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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**PREPARING FOR UPHEAVAL IN NORTH KOREA:  
ASSUMING NORTH KOREAN REGIME COLLAPSE**

by

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December 2013

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**PREPARING FOR UPHEAVAL IN NORTH KOREA: ASSUMING NORTH  
KOREAN REGIME COLLAPSE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis will attempt to provide the optimal policy prescription for the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army on how to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate (DDR) the North Korean people in the case of their regime collapse. It is important to know how the likelihood of environment in which post-conflict reconstruction efforts will be implemented. The viability of any contingency plan should be assessed, based on an assumption about the environment being in probable upheaval. However, little analysis of the viability of the contingency plan, including the DDR program, has been undertaken in the context of North Korean regime collapse. Especially, the research about expectations and assumptions related to the possible North Korean attitude and probable post-regime collapse environment has been rare. The contingency planning, thus, needs further research and empirical supporting data, which can enhance its viability in practice. Given this perspective, this thesis attempts to predict the North Korean people's possible attitude in their upheaval, based on analysis about the current regime's control system and recent changes. This thesis also assumes different scenarios in which DDR would be implemented to reconstruct a post-conflict society, by differentiating critical uncertainties in each case.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
IDDRS	Integrated DDR Standards
KPA	Korea People's Army
PDS	Public Distribution System
PLA	People's Liberation Army
ROK	Republic of Korea
GDR	German Democratic Republic
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The various issues regarding North Korea never slipped my mind. It is interesting to see that the discussions regarding North Korea periodically emerge and disappear like flu. It was about nuclear weapons when North Korea conducted a series of nuclear tests and declared its possession of nuclear weapons. It was about regime collapse when Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il died and disastrous famine struck its economy severely. Despite this kind of fashion about North Korean issues, I have kept one question in my mind. What will happen if North Korea suddenly collapses? This question led me to study abroad and dragged me to the point where I'm wrapping up my thesis about North Korean regime collapse.

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

This thesis will attempt to provide the optimal policy prescription for the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army on how to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate (DDR) the North Korean people in the case of their regime collapse. In 2008, former Commander, Combined Forces Command, General Walter Sharp announced that “response plans to an upheaval in North Korea had been prepared ... South Korean and U.S. militaries had made thorough preparations not only for an all-out war against North Korea, but also for scenarios such as instability in the country or a regime change.”<sup>1</sup> However, little analysis of the viability of the contingency plan, including the DDR program, has been undertaken. The plan, thus, needs further research and empirical supporting data, which can enhance its viability in practice. Given this perspective, this thesis attempts to predict the North Korean people’s possible attitude during a period of upheaval, based on the current regime’s control system and recent changes. This thesis also assumes different scenarios in which DDR would be implemented to reconstruct a post-conflict society. Thus, the primary question this research seeks to answer is: What is the probable environment in which DDR will be implemented in the case of North Korean regime collapse?

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

A DDR program provides essential elements of post-conflict stability that reduce the likelihood of resumed conflict. While the reconstruction of North Korea will entail a range of tasks such as security, justice and reconciliation, social and economic well-being, and governance and participation, the security pillar should precede all others to provide a stable condition on which other reconstruction tasks can be implemented.<sup>2</sup> Given that a security pillar is the precondition for achieving a successful outcome in the other reconstruction pillars, DDR, as the initial task of security reconstruction, can serve as a

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<sup>1</sup> “OPLAN 5029 Risks Ceding South Korean Sovereignty to the U.S.,” *The Hankyoreh*, November 2, 2009, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_northkorea/385351.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/385351.html).

<sup>2</sup> “Post-conflict Reconstruction: Task Framework,” Association of the United States Army and Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2002, 3.

vital confidence-building measure in the early days after cessation of hostilities. Since dealing with former combatants is one of the most often recurring challenges of any post-conflict reconstruction, failure to return ex-combatants to civilian life or to promote them into a legitimate security institution leads to long-term difficulties across all areas of reconstruction. Fortunately, prior instances of implemented stability operations and reconstruction missions in post-conflict societies, conducted mostly by the United Nations (UN) and the United States, have accumulated many lessons for disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating former combatants.

Given that North Korea is one of the world's most militarized and unstable states, the contingency plan in the case of its regime collapse should be carefully planned, based on those lessons. Since North Korea maintains both armed forces of more than one million members, which heavily rely on government-provided food, and huge stocks of conventional weapons as well as a few nuclear weapons, North Korean regime collapse could unleash a series of far-reaching regional and global catastrophes, ranging from humanitarian crises to nuclear proliferation.<sup>3</sup> In addition, since adopting the Four-Point Military Lines in 1962, North Korea officially has pursued arming the entire population, including youth and females.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, irrespective of the upheaval scenario, the establishment of security and stability in the absence of governance should address the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of the North Korean people. DDR, thus, should be a priority mission after North Korea regime collapse.<sup>5</sup>

### **C. PROBLEM AND HYPHOTHESIS**

Developing the contingency DDR plan in the case of a North Korea regime collapse raises many questions: What is the likelihood of the collapse of North Korea in the foreseeable future? What is the range of plausible scenarios for a North Korea collapse? Who is responsible for stabilizing the region? From what source will those

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce W. Bennett and Jennifer Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," *International Security* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 84.

<sup>4</sup> Defense White Paper 2012 (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2013), 27.

<sup>5</sup> "North Korea Contingency Planning and U.S.-ROK Cooperation," Center for U.S.-Korean Policy, The Asia Foundation, 2009, 9.

conducting stabilization and reconstruction in North Korea get their legitimacy? What will be the likely attitude of North Koreans being disarmed? Will other stakeholders beyond South Korea and the United States, especially China, intervene in the situation? These kinds of issues cannot be ignored in developing the contingency plan, and assumptions about North Korea in an anarchic situation are indeed scenario-dependent.

Fully answering these broad questions with regard to the uncertainties of North Korean collapse scenarios is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the thesis does not simply make single assumptions about these questions. Rather, the research uses a range of assumptions concerning the possible future situations in which DDR will be implemented. This will enable policy-making recommendations that are sensitive to future uncertainty. In particular, research will be conducted based on two assumptions.

Since the aim of this thesis is to provide a policy prescription to the ROK Army, the first assumption is that, among the many stakeholders involved, South Korea will be the main actor that carries out DDR in North Korea. The stabilizing forces probably will be multilateral, composed of the ROK Army, the U.S. Army, or even the People's Liberation Army (PLA), but the thesis assumes they will be led by the ROK Army. Of course, this assumption is not free from legal and political debate. Therefore, the thesis does not exclude the possibility of external intervention in the implementation of DDR. Especially, Chinese analysts and officials currently view the insertion of any foreign military forces into North Korea as an illegal military intervention.<sup>6</sup> The thesis, therefore, will investigate how this probable external intervention might impede the DDR process by examining other relevant cases.

Second, the analysis assumes that the collapse of the North Korean regime leaves no central control over its entire territory. In such a situation, the North Korean regime and its government do not function anymore and its people will be subject to chaotic disorder. The assumption, however, does not exclude the possibility of resistance by the

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<sup>6</sup> Bennett and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," 93; Paul B. Stares and Joel S. Wit, *Preparing for Sudden Change in North Korea* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2009), 6, <http://www.cfr.org/world/preparing-sudden-change-north-korea/p18019>; Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, *China's Impact on Korean Peninsula Unification and Questions for the Senate* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2012), 3, 10.

North Korean people. The case of German reunification was successful due to an East German cooperative attitude and the country's willingness to be accepted into Western Germany. Such a benign scenario has value for the contingency plan to some extent. The Iraq experience, however, shows the risk of military planning that assumes no resistance. Uncontrolled Iraqi military dismantlement, after the Saddam regime's collapse, also provides another angle from which to depict a probable situation in North Korea.<sup>7</sup> Thus, this thesis assumes that insurgency is more likely in the North Korean case. Since North Korea is one of the most propagandistic and indoctrinated states, it is too optimistic to assume that there will be no insurgent movement against stabilizing forces. Therefore, the thesis focuses on the other cases where coercive methods of DDR were implemented despite some resistance by those being disarmed.

Given these assumptions, the author hypothesizes that these critical uncertainties, the attitude of North Koreans being disarmed and possible external intervention, bearing on the basic assumptions will be critical exogenous factors that affect the process of DDR in North Korea's upheaval. A preliminary look at previous practice and academic research suggests that DDR has been more commonly impeded by unpredictable exogenous factors rather than endogenous ones.<sup>8</sup>

Research for this thesis, therefore, will assess exogenous factors in the North Korean case. It will begin by assuming the North Korean people's possible attitude toward the efforts of reconstructing, DDR, by the outsiders. Then, it will differentiate dimensions of uncertain variables and describe how those exogenous factors interact and create the different environments in which DDR will be implemented.

## **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Conceptualizing DDR**

Substantial literature on DDR has been published in response to numerous UN-led DDR initiatives around the world. Since the early 1990s, when the rapid rise in civil

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<sup>7</sup> Bennett and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," 109.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations* (New York, NY: United Nations, 2010), 30.

wars and ethnic conflict in the post-Cold War era required a systemic approach to post-conflict reconstruction, the UN has continued the conceptualization and practice of peacebuilding. In this context, a set of processes for dealing with former combatants, known as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), has been evolved by practitioners and scholars, and it has become a standard element in post-conflict reconstruction. The Brahimi report notes that “DDR programs are essential elements of post-conflict stability that reduce the likelihood of resumed conflict.”<sup>9</sup> The report has served as the stepping stone for improving UN capacity to meet surging demand in war-torn society reconstruction. How noteworthy, then, that the Brahimi report recognizes the importance of DDR. Recognizing the need for multi-dimensional peacebuilding missions, the UN Security Council has included DDR in all mandates of the last seven peacekeeping missions since 2000.<sup>10</sup>

While the UN has published much literature on DDR, the UN Secretary General’s note to the General Assembly provides what has become the accepted definition of DDR within the UN system.<sup>11</sup>

It defines the elements of DDR as follows: *Disarmament* is “the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of former combatants, belligerents, and the local populace.”<sup>12</sup> Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms-management programs, and it is best carried out when those being disarmed are voluntary and cooperative. With a lack of trust between those being disarmed and the forces overseeing disarmament, the process, however, often causes a security dilemma among the people. That is, because

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<sup>9</sup> William J. Durch, Victoria K. Holt, Caroline R. Earle, and Moria K. Shanahan, “The Brahimi Report and the Future of UN Peace Operations” (Washington, DC: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), 27.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, *Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (New York, NY: United Nations, 2011), 25; United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *DDR in Peace Operations: A Retrospective* (New York, NY: United Nations, 2010), 4; United Nations Security Council, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *DDR in Peace Operations: A Retrospective*, 4.

being disarmed means abandoning basic and sometimes the only means of protection, it is difficult for some former combatants to trust other parties and to participate in disarmament without a security guarantee. Hence, some groups and individuals may hesitate to cooperate or even refuse to take part in the disarmament process. The previous lines of research acknowledge that disarmament may occur in two stages: a voluntary disarmament process followed by measures that are more coercive.<sup>13</sup> In short, high levels of trust between the people being disarmed and those disarming them, along with a security guarantee by the disarming units, should take precedence over the implementation of disarmament.

*Demobilization* is defined as “the act of changing from a state of war to a state of peace, including disbanding or discharging troops,” and it involves the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups.<sup>14</sup> Demobilization starts from identifying and gathering former combatants, and the task extends to the processing of individual former combatants in temporary centers and the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose. It also involves not only physically dismantling combatant chains of command but also replacing belligerent group loyalties with more appropriate group affiliations and restoring their identity as part of the national population. The UN calls this process the first stage of demobilization and differentiates it from the second stage, which encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized.<sup>15</sup> In short, in the first stage of demobilization, the tasks of identifying and targeting former combatants and armed groups for demobilization are significant.

During the second stage of demobilization, called reinsertion, former combatants are provided short-term material assistance to help cover their basic needs prior to the

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations*, 13; Department of the Army, *Stability Operations*, Field Manual FM3-07, October 2008, 6–19; Shane R. Doolan, “Coercive Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR): Can It Be Successful?” (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2008), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Department of State, *Lessons-Learned: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in Reconstruction and Stabilization*, 2006, 36; United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *DDR in Peace Operations*, 4; United Nations Security Council, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *DDR in Peace Operations*, 4.

longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion can include provision of food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training and employment, and this short-term support can last up to one year. In this sense, providing sufficient material support in a timely manner and securing distribution of provisions should be considered at every level of the process. Otherwise, the problems caused by funding delays and gaps in implementing the program undermine the whole process, as was seen in the cases of Afghanistan, Liberia and Congo.<sup>16</sup>

While reinsertion functions as short-term assistance for ex-combatants, the UN sees *reintegration* as “the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income.”<sup>17</sup> It includes programs imparting basic vocational skills, assistance finding employment in local communities and support for ex-combatant resettlement in civilian society. Long-term reintegration helps ex-combatants become socially and economically embedded in their communities. As such, it makes significant contributions economically, socially and politically to the reconstruction of fragile or failed states. In this sense, reintegration is essentially a social and economic process and cannot be separated from justice and reconciliation programs that are part of the broader transition process. Thus, successful reintegration is hard to achieve and tends to be long term and costly, requiring coordinated efforts that may need external assistance.

## **2. Lessons Learned**

The first UN actions dealing with DDR date back to Security Council resolution 650 (1990), which mandated that the United Nations Observer Group in Central America include the demobilization of anti-government elements in Nicaragua.<sup>18</sup> Since that time, experience and know-how for success have been accumulated within not only the UN but also related states and international institutions.

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<sup>16</sup> Wolf-Christian Paes, “The Challenges of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in Liberia,” *International Peacekeeping*, 12 no. 2 (2005): 254; Caroline A. Hartzell, “Missed Opportunities: The Impact of DDR on SSR in Afghanistan,” United States Institute of Peace, 2011, 3–4; Severine Autesserre, *The Trouble with Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *DDR in Peace Operations*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

The early literature on DDR focused on a small number of case studies. While most DDR literature has emerged since 2000, Mats R. Berdal, one of the early writers on DDR, emphasized an integrated and holistic approach that entails institutional, political and operational requirements. He drew on failed cases, such as Congo.<sup>19</sup> He concluded that implementing DDR is difficult within short time frames and when many stakeholders are involved. It is noteworthy how early in the experience of DDR the need for an integrated approach was recognized. In the same vein, Nicole Ball emphasized an integrated approach and noted that “it should be undertaken as an integral component of a broad conflict.”<sup>20</sup> She also provided specific policy recommendations on the basis of early experiences in Africa. Ball especially mentioned the importance of the political willingness of the involved parties and sufficient economic support from the international community. These early efforts, nonetheless, recognized the dangers of drawing general lessons from diverse experiences since those could distort the details of each individual case.

A more comprehensive guide was made in the UN’s Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) in 2006. It amounted to a significant initiative to promote an integrated approach between UN agencies and other actors in the DDR process. In more than 700 pages, it provided guidance for an integrated approach and effective DDR process for those planning and implementing DDR processes. Covering a broad scope of related issues--such as personnel and finance for the mission, social and economic integration of former combatants, the importance of the role of women and children and health and HIV--, IDDRS suggested the key characteristics of DDR: people centered; flexible, transparent and accountable; nationally owned; integrated and well planned.<sup>21</sup> While this ambitious effort enhances the effectiveness and integrity of the DDR program in practice,

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<sup>19</sup> Mats R. Berdal, *Disarmament and Demobilization after Civil Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Nicole Ball, *Demobilizing and Reintegrating Soldiers: Lessons from Africa*, ed. Krishna Kumar (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner 1997), 15.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards* (New York, NY: United Nations, 2006), 8–15.



ongoing projects such as those in Sudan, Haiti, and Sri Lanka still demonstrate how hazardous it can be relying on previous lessons without considering the specific context in which DDR is implemented.

The most recent guide for DDR was made in 2010, by launching the Second Generation DDR. Acknowledging the complexity of conflicts, the Second Generation DDR provided valuable lessons from past experience. It identified key recurring challenges that have undermined the integrated effort of DDR program, based on the experiences in Afghanistan, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti and Liberia. However, the Second Generation DDR also did not suggest a permanent formulation for DDR success. It concluded that the complexity of the environment could be addressed by responding to the specific context of each case.<sup>22</sup>

### **3. Applicability to North Korea**

The assumption that the collapse of North Korea will generate an anarchic situation is indeed scenario-dependent. Most literature, thus, has focused on assuming scenarios about North Korean regime collapse, covering uncertain factors in a broad sense and providing somewhat limited policy recommendation to the ROK-US alliance. While these early efforts called attention to the need of preparing for upheaval, Bruce W. Bennett and Jennifer Lind suggest a more specific policy to the case of the North Korean regime falling. They specify the military requirements to meet a chaotic situation and estimate that 260,000–400,000 ground forces personnel will be required to stabilize North Korea in its upheaval.<sup>23</sup> They point out requirements to disarm and demobilize the North Korean military. However, their policy recommendations are based on assumptions that are too optimistic because they exclude the possibility of external intervention and resistance from those being disarmed. They also do not provide specific detail on how North Korean former combatants can be demobilized. While their research valuably provides a more detailed policy recommendation on one probable situation in North

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<sup>22</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations*, 1–30.

<sup>23</sup> Bennett and Lind, “The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements,” 86.

Korea than other analyses, the research for this thesis covers a much broader range of the critical uncertainties bearing on prospects for success of future DDR activities in North Korea.

As previous lines of research suggested, many exogenous factors in the case of North Korean regime collapse cannot be listed at this moment. Thus, examining the viability of the DDR program in the contingency plan is not an easy task. Former Chief of DDR, Gromo Alex notes, “The challenges for DDR cannot be listed or calibrated. At every turn we find something new that we need to address: a combatant’s reluctance, difficult terrain, inadequate logistics, insufficient staffing, intervention by political leaders of armed groups, and insecurity risks.”<sup>24</sup> *Field Manual 3-07, Stability Operations*, also acknowledges that successful DDR programs use many approaches designed for specific security environments. Each program reflects the unique aspects of the situation, culture and character of the state. In this sense, generalizing about the element of either a successful DDR program or failed cases can be dangerous since it can distort the details of each individual case.

However, that is not to say that assessing the possible implementation of a DDR program in North Korea is impossible. Some basic principles found in the case study should be considered to supplement the plan. Further research in terms of North Korean governing institutions, military organization and character of community should be conducted along with ROK-U.S. alliance inter-agency coordination. More research at the micro level is also needed.

## **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

Research began with literature about North Korean society. Since North Korea is one of the most isolated states in the world, available information is highly limited. Nonetheless, some scholars’ close observation into the closed society provides valuable information about the control system of North Korean society. By utilizing this information, this research identifies four major elements that constitute the regime’s

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<sup>24</sup> United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *DDR in Peace Operations: A Retrospective* (New York, NY: United Nations, 2010), 9.

control system. Then, the author makes an assumption by analyzing these elements at the micro level. Especially, the study focuses on how the attitude and willingness of those being disarmed and the intervention of external actors could affect the DDR process and how those factors can be managed.

In addition, this thesis uses a variety of sources: mostly UN literature, government reports (those of USAID, the Department of State and the Department of Defense), policy papers from the World Bank and other relevant agencies, and scholarly journals, as well as books on DDR and North Korea.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

The thesis will consist of four chapters. The introduction begins with the concept of DDR, explaining how the DDR concept has been developed and what lessons have been accumulated. Providing principles and guidelines for DDR from past experiences, it also explains why DDR is important in the case of a North Korean regime collapse. Chapter II addresses the foundation of the North Korean control mechanism. In order to anticipate the North Korean people's attitude in the absence of governance and control, one should know how the current regime's control system is working. Thus, this study identifies the elements of the control system and how these elements were established and have been changed up to now. Chapter III will explain the different environments in which DDR will potentially be implemented. Different collapse scenarios are studied. Different scenarios are created, by differentiating critical and uncertain variables. One might argue that it is impossible to make a precise prediction regarding North Korean regime collapse. This is true since there are too many uncertain variables regarding the issue. However, the purpose of scenario making is not to predict the future but to prepare for a wide range of uncertainties. Thus, it is not important to make a precise scenario. Rather, the plausibility of scenarios is necessary to prepare for uncertain situations. To conclude, Chapter IV provides a policy recommendation based on the research findings.

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## II. NORTH KOREAN ATTITUDE TOWARD UPHEAVAL

### A. INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) were published offering valuable guidance in implementing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants in the post-conflict environment. IDDRS also suggests a set of preconditions that should be in place before a DDR begins. These are the signing of a negotiated peace agreement that provides a legal framework for DDR, trust in the peace process, willingness of the parties to the conflict to engage in DDR and a minimum guarantee of security.<sup>25</sup> Previous DDR experiences of the UN in Afghanistan, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, however, show that these conditions are often not met. In a majority of the cases examined, all warring parties are not included in the stabilization and reconstruction process; or even worse, in many cases, these target groups are not identified. In this regard, identifying pre-conditions in which DDR is to be implemented and the population's motivations to resist against stabilizing forces should be pursued to guarantee the success of DDR in the case of North Korea regime collapse. Furthermore, as the UN research of Second Generation DDR notes, it is also important to look beyond the identified target, the Korean People's Army (KPA) in this case, and to consider a possibility of insurgent movement from unidentified groups in the population.<sup>26</sup>

Intuitively, it is possible for someone to assume that North Korean citizens will greet foreign forces warmly at the end of sixty years of dictatorship since they have been victims of oppression and tyranny. The more ideal expectation for the ROK stabilizing forces will be the North Korean people's anti-government protests in an attempt to expel

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<sup>25</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations*, 12.

a remnant of the former authoritarian regime. These are possible scenarios, and these kind of benign scenarios provide a basic framework that can be adjusted as circumstances require, as Bruce Bennett argues.<sup>27</sup>

It can be hypothesized, however, that a cordial welcome is not likely to happen. The majority of the North Korean people will be likely to remain passive without knowing the progress of the situation, and although it will be highly affected by variable factors such as the emergence of an illegitimate government and organized riots of local military leaders, their initial response to the ROK stabilizing forces will vary by the degree of people's loyalty to the former regime.

To support this idea, the thesis will identify the four major elements of the regime's control methods, namely, the social control system, *songbun* system, ideological indoctrination and role of the KPA. The possible attitude of the people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to their regime collapse will be suggested by analyzing how these elements have contributed to the North Korean regime's sustainability and how recent changes of these elements will affect the people's way of thinking and behaving in the absence of control. Then, possible scenarios of post-collapse North Korea in which DDR is implemented will be suggested.

## **B. INSIDE NORTH KOREA**

North Korea is one of the most isolated and closed states in the world. As many analysts and scholars point out, it is difficult to look inside this closed society and get accurate information on how the control system in North Korea is functioning. Available information is limited to superficial observance of invited visitors, such as scholars, reporters, and high-level officials, and testimony of defectors. It is likely that this kind of information is biased and partial since North Korea shows them what its government wants to show. Considering North Koreans' restricted freedom of movement within their country, information from defectors could also be biased and incomplete. However, North Korea has survived and still maintains its control over the population. The author would argue that North Korea's control mechanism until the 1990s had been effective

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<sup>27</sup> Bennett and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," 86.

and penetrated into its society more deeply than one can imagine, to the extent that it enabled an unstable regime to persist up to now. Despite the fact that North Korea has been changing due to an economic downturn since the 1990s, the country is likely to be still affected by this control system to some extent. In this context, this main section reviews the historical foundation of each control method of the North Korean regime: various social control systems, the *songbun* system, ideological indoctrination, and the role of the KPA. Then, this section also examines implications of recent changes within these elements since the 1990s economic downturn.

### **1. Foundation of the Social Control System**

The control system is constituted of not only surveillance of people's daily life but also control over people's basic needs, such as food and housing, as well as restrictions on education and employment. Identifying these various control methods should precede assuming the North Korean situation in the absence of these control mechanism.

First of all, the public distribution system (PDS) plays a major role that enables the North Korean regime to control its population. According to Andrei Lankov, from the time when the North Korean government banned private trade in rice and other grains in 1957 and until around 1990, grains and other foodstuffs could only be acquired, almost exclusively, through the PDS.<sup>28</sup> Considering North Korea's economic downturn and famine since the 1990s and the fact that food is vital to people's daily necessities, the PDS functions as one of the most powerful political tools to mobilize the population and reward people's loyalty to the regime. Indeed, the North Korean government distributes not only food but also basic consumer goods based on hierarchical order in the society.

Second, all North Korean males are required to work for the state. After graduation from high school, all North Koreans are assigned to their jobs by the state regardless of the individual's will. North Korean people are not allowed to look for jobs themselves, and changing one's job needs an approval of the authorities.

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<sup>28</sup> Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 35.

Third, the North Korean government's control even penetrates an individual's private life. Many authoritarian states strive to keep an eye on the population but not as deeply as North Korea regime does. A person's place of residence can be changed only with the approval of authorities. North Korean people are not allowed to travel without a special travel permit, to be issued by the authorities. Lankov points out that, even under Stalin's rule, short-term domestic travel was possible in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).<sup>29</sup>

Along with this travel permit system, the North Korean regime has also developed an institution, called *inminban*, to enforce surveillance on its population. The term *inminban* means "people's group" in North Korean and includes 20 to 40 families in a certain residential block. Thus, every North Korean belongs to an *inminban*. While the *inminban* is headed by an official, the police also supervise the *inminban*, and the head officers must report suspicious activities, such as anti-regime comments and behaviors, to the resident police officer. In this regard, the *inminban* plays a major role in enforcing control over North Koreans. The people's behavior is tightly controlled and restricted by this system.

Another significant control system of the North Korean regime is the organizational life that is designed to enforce surveillance and ideological indoctrination. Every North Korean has to belong to an organization such as the ruling Korean Worker's Party, trade union or agricultural union. These organizations often hold meetings through which every participant is supposed to confess his/her misdeeds as judged by the state's ideological standards. In a sense that people would not admit one's misbehavior that might lead to serious punishment, the system could have only a demonstration effect. However, in the meeting (a so-called self-criticism and mutual criticism session), a participant is expected to criticize the particular person for his/her misdeeds.

In the Kim Il-sung era, these control systems functioned to keep the population under the regime's control. Unfortunately, there is no evidence showing to what extent these different social control systems functioned in making people loyal to the regime.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 38.



However, there is a common feature in these different control mechanisms. That is, there are certain people who have privileges while the others are controlled by these privileged few who are given authority by the regime. Even if one cannot measure the North Korean people's degree of assimilation into the Kim family regime's way of control, it is obvious that people are not all treated the same by the regime and that dissension derived from the gulf between the privileged and disadvantaged is likely to exist.

In the PDS, while the privileged inhabitants of Pyongyang received more than half of their grain rations in rice, the countryside inhabitants receive corn and wheat flour. On special occasions, distinguished individuals are even given luxury consumer goods such as wristwatches and TV sets as presents from the Great Leader.<sup>30</sup> Preferential treatment is also seen in the process of assigning the jobs. While some are forced to work as farmers, those who are seen as both academically smart and, most of all, politically reliable are chosen by the state and allowed to pursue a college education.

In addition, the restriction on longtime residence and short-term travel demonstrates differentiation within the North Korean people. The situation of North Korea cities other than Pyongyang and Kaesong is in dire straits. Apartment buildings have no heat or windows. Without any sign of mechanization, farmers still use old oxen to till the land. The roads are cracked, and the mountains have been stripped of all of their trees. As Victor Cha points out, "One cannot live in the capital city without some connection to the party, military, or bureaucracy."<sup>31</sup> In this regard, it is likely that people residing in Pyongyang are privileged and they are more likely to be differentiated from people in suburban areas.

Considering the way the control mechanism works through *inminban* and organizational life, there seems to be a disparity between those who control and monitor commoners and those being controlled and monitored. The head of *inminban* is one of the privileged people in the society. Since an *inminban* head plays a major role in the enforcement of domestic travel control and general surveillance, he/she is supposed to

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>31</sup> Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 163.

report any suspicious conduct of *inminban* members. It is hard to say that all *inminban* heads are separated from others in terms of ideological assimilation to the regime and loyalty to their supreme leader. It is also uncertain whether these people who are more privileged than the average North Korean person will cooperate with or resist stabilizing forces. Of significance is the fact that these people have benefited more than anyone else in their system, and the gap between *inminban* head and members is likely to exist.

*a. Recent Changes in the Social Control System*

According to experts, the aforementioned social control systems, which were mostly established in the Kim Il-sung era, have been less effective since the 1990s. In the 1990s, when North Korea faced serious famine and natural disasters, the state-run economy collapsed and so did the PDS. People sought food for survival, and farmers chose to start growing their own food as the alternative to death by starvation. In urban areas, the old state-run economy was replaced by private economic activities associated with what is described as a black market. According to Lankov, most urban families began bartering household items for food, and they started to trade their household production with each other, which is not allowed in the North Korean system.<sup>32</sup> As illegal private markets emerged, some people accumulated their own money. The changes continued to spread among people despite state restrictions and several economic reforms to reinstate order. For instance, it is estimated that the share of income from private activities reached almost 80 percent of the total income of North Korean households between 1998 and 2008.<sup>33</sup> More than two-thirds of defectors admitted that half or more of their income came from private business, and it was also found that more than 50 percent of former urban residents purchased as much as 75 percent of their food from the market.<sup>34</sup> In addition, more than 50 percent of all restaurants and shops were privately

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<sup>32</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Byung-Yeon Kim and Dongho Song, "The Participation of North Korean Households in the Informal Economy: Size, Determinants, and Effect," *Seoul Journal of Economics* 21, no. 2 (2008): 373.

<sup>34</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 447.

owned in 2009.<sup>35</sup> The emergence of private capital indicates that there seems to be another strong motivation in people's lives other than ideology and state guidance.

Along with privatization, there are many other changes that indicate a loss of social control, such as the loss of control over domestic travel and the Sino-DPRK border. North Koreans were and still are expected to apply for a travel permit for an overnight trip outside the borders of their country or city. However, as the economy collapsed in 1990s, not only typical citizens but also enforcers and indoctrinators faced the threat of starvation. As these bureaucrats have begun to turn a blind eye to illegal activities in exchange for bribes, the system of regulations and surveillances is slowly but inexorably crumbling. For instance, according to Lankov, nowadays one can bribe a police official to get a travel permit. Some North Koreans now have radios, which used to be seen as a political crime, and they can cross the border by paying bribes.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the Corruption Perceptions Index 2012 indicates that North Korea is ranked 174 out of 176 countries in terms of public sector corruption.<sup>37</sup>

As a result, some North Korean people now can access information about South Korea by watching TV and listening to radio, and they are increasingly aware of South Korea's prosperity and North Korea's relative deprivation. According to Lankov, it seems that in border areas and major cities, some 70 to 80 percent of all households were in possession of a DVD player by early 2012.<sup>38</sup> The possession of a DVD player itself is not illegal, but it can be assumed that more or less all these families have watched South Korean movies and TV dramas, which are illegal. The growing awareness of the outside world is changing North Korean attitudes toward their regime. Internal dissent is not unheard of anymore, and even occasional riots have been reported.<sup>39</sup>

The significance of organizational life has also declined since the 1990s. As the social control erodes, people have begun to ignore the institutions of state that kept

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<sup>35</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 82–85.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>.

<sup>38</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 103.

<sup>39</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 452–53.

them under surveillance. The weekly mutual-criticism and indoctrination meetings have become less frequent and lost their intensity in the Kim Jong-il era. With bribery, one can skip this session in order not to miss profit at the market. Overall, there is no doubt that the failure of the North Korean economy has created conditions for individual economic initiative and pervasive corruption.

Economic privatization and incremental loss of social control, however, should not be overestimated and undermine the regime. Despite all these palpable changes in people's daily life, according to their way of thinking North Korea still remains one of the most repressive regimes in the world. From many defectors' testimony about difficulties on the way out of their mother nation, one can assume that its surveillance system is still second to none in efficiency and brutality. North Korea still maintains its control over the population and manages to survive despite all these changes. Even some experts such as Alexander Mansourov and Bruce Cumings argue that the collapse of North Korea is less likely to happen.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the focal point is not whether North Korea will collapse or not, but it is that changes are palpable that were not present before.

## **2. *Songbun* System**

There is another clue that supports the idea of possible divergence of the North Korean people within the control system: the *songbun* system. The Korean word *songbun* means ingredients or material. The North Korean regime uses the word to refer to one's socio-political background. North Korea's regime differentiates its people according to their family background, loyalty to the regime, and hereditary castes. The regime has conducted checking of the family background of every North Korean since 1958. Since then, the regime has continually made thorough investigations into people's family

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<sup>40</sup> Bruce Cumings, "Why Did So Many Influential Americans Think North Korea Would Collapse?" in Suk Hi Kim, Terence Roehrig, and Bernhard Seliger, eds. *The Survival of North Korea: Essays on Strategy, Economics and International Relations* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2011), 44–63; Alexander Mansourov, "Kim Jong Un's Domestic Policy Record in His First Year: Surprisingly Good," *38north.org*. January 15, 2013, <http://38north.org/2013/01/amansourov011613/>

background and now categorizes the population into three classes and 45 subgroups.<sup>41</sup> Every North Korean belongs to one of three categories: loyal or core, wavering or agitating, or hostile.<sup>42</sup> Kim Il-sung gave a public speech in 1958 in which he reported that the core class represented 25 percent, wavering class 55 percent and hostile class 20 percent of the population.<sup>43</sup> People are usually classified in accordance to what their male ancestors did in the past. That is, people whose ancestors contributed to the establishment of the Kim family regime are considered members of the core class whereas people whose ancestors were former landlords, Christians or defectors are classified as hostile. Based on this ascribed status, the chances of an individual obtaining an opportunity for social movement are limited. In addition, a recent research found that the size of the nutritional categories is about the same as the size of the three social classes.<sup>44</sup> It seems that the regime was feeding people through the PDS based on their *songbun* classification. That is, the *songbun* system determined not only the possibility of social mobility but also ration levels in the PDS. Likewise, the research also claims that the *songbun* system has affected many aspects of the North Korean people's lives, such as party membership, education, employment, housing, healthcare and so on. In this context, the presence of the *songbun* system implies institutionalized inequality among the people in North Korea.

***a. Recent Changes in the Songbun System***

Economic privatization and incremental loss of social control also lead to changes in features of class structure to some extent. The state's inability to feed its people has provided new opportunities. Individuals in most categories of *songbun* have been able to earn some money through their own initiative. For instance, regardless of inherent *songbun*, a member of a hostile *songbun* could climb to an upper economic class by using his or her accumulated private capital. As some privileged economic actors have

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<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Unification Institute for Unification Education, *Understanding North Korea* (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 2012). 283.

<sup>42</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Collins, *Marked for Life: Songbun: North Korea's Social Classification System*, The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea 2012, III, [http://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK\\_Songbun\\_Web.pdf](http://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_Songbun_Web.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

illegally accumulated wealth, this change has led to an extreme polarization of the economy and widespread corruption in society. Thus, not only one's *songbun* but also his or her economic status has now become an important indicator of social position. In addition, a particular individual's ability to bribe, given accumulated wealth, has helped those of the lower *songbun* classes to overcome restrictions paced upon them by the inherent class system, the *songbun*.

However, this does not mean that social movement through a change in economic status is a common phenomenon and that the class system-based society has transformed into a new society. The private market and business have been tolerated only as a means of coping with emergencies, and ascension in economic status remains dependent on the regime's existing policy.<sup>45</sup> Although bribing one's way out of police trouble or into better colleges, buying better medical service and purchasing better housing has provided some alternative avenue for survival, it does not change a deep-rooted *songbun*-based social order. Prisoners' camps still exists, and most lower *songbun* citizens are suffering from heavy-labor jobs. *Songbun* investigation continues to classify every single North Koreans into a *songbun* category.<sup>46</sup> It is still those of higher *songbun* who makes critical decisions.

Nonetheless, it is significant that the change in class structure implies a further complicated and diversified response of North Korean citizens in the case of their regime's collapse. It is not clear whether these wealthy people will flee the country with their wealth as some East German businessmen did when the Berlin Wall fell or whether they will cooperate with new authorities to keep their vested rights in a new order. It is highly probable that these wealthy people's behavior will be driven by human nature, greed and need rather than ideological fervor.

### **3. Juche Ideology**

Another element, the most important one, the North Korean regime has used to keep control over its population has been ideological indoctrination. After the end of

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<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Unification Institute for Unification Education, *Understanding North Korea*, 286–88.

<sup>46</sup> Collins, *Marked for life: Songbun: North Korea's Social Classification System*, 24–27.

Japan's cruel colonization, communism in North Korea suggested an ideal model that many pre-modern Koreans had dreamed of. Later, many situational factors, such as the Sino-Soviet split, the confrontation with South Korea backed up by the United States, contributed to the development of a unique North Korean ideology that is a mix of Marxist-Leninism, Korean nationalism, Confucianism and anti-Japanese sentiment. Given South Korea's corrupt leadership and poor economic status at the time, *juche* ideology, which emphasized self-reliance and loyalty to the supreme leader, became a source of strength and control for the regime. In this sense, *juche* indoctrination has provided the primary basis of regime legitimacy.

The reason one should not overlook *juche* in discussing the North Korean upheaval is that the ideology runs much deeper than one might imagine. Victor Cha notes that *juche* ideology forms the backbone of the state's control.<sup>47</sup> North Korean constitutional revisions in 2009 prescribe that the *juche* ideology of the Great Leader Kim Il-sung is the sole guiding doctrine for people's activities.<sup>48</sup> Cha also notes that "under *juche*, North Korea could not rely on the good graces of others, it had to fend for itself and preserve true Korean identity."<sup>49</sup> Thus, the *juche* ideology strongly reflects a nationalistic sentiment that resists the infiltration of any imperialistic elements. In this sense, according to the *juche* ideology, it is highly probable that North Korean citizens are going to resist any external force trying to liberate them.

One might say that the ideology could be merely a nameplate that justifies the regime's ruthless control. On the day of Kim Il-sung's death, the North Korean media broadcast hours of people wailing en masse as if it was a spontaneous outpouring. However, while some people's reaction could have been spontaneous, there could have been others who were obliged to do so because their survival was at stake. Indeed, the *inminban* kept record of how often people went to the Kim Il-sung statue to show their

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<sup>47</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Unification Institute for Unification Education, *Understanding North Korea*, 30.

<sup>49</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 37.

loyalty and respect.<sup>50</sup> Based on the testimony of North Korean defectors who experienced the incident at the time, Barbara Demick notes, “In the middle of a crowd of crying people, the only natural human reaction is to cry oneself.”<sup>51</sup> The North Korean people’s mass behavior could be derived from infectious hysteria rather than ideological indoctrination. People could be forced to behave under the suppressive regime. It is problematic that there is no evidence that shows to what extent the North Korean people are indoctrinated by *juche* ideology.

Although it is hard to predict people’s response to their regime collapse, again, a cordial welcome to stabilizing forces is not likely to happen in North Korea. That is, while one doubts the effectiveness of ideological indoctrination, some evidence suggest that ideological indoctrination is no less effective than one thinks. According to Demick, the death rate in the aftermath of Kim Il-sung’s death increased since many older North Koreans suffered heart attacks and strokes.<sup>52</sup> Some even committed suicide while others starved themselves. In this context, it seems that the cult of personality works to some extent and that some people are sincerely loyal to their regime.

#### *a. Recent Changes in Ideology*

*Juche* ideology, which has had a significant impact on every aspect of North Korea, has also faced challenges as the economy has deteriorated since the 1990s. In the Kim Il-sung era, *juche* indoctrination along with a relatively superior economic performance provided the primary basis of regime legitimacy. Although it was transformed into a personality cult of Kim Il-sung in the 1960s, people were satisfied with their economic status, and the *suryong*, Kim Il-sung was believed to enable all these benefits. The social control mechanism and information blockade also support the regime to maintain its control effectively. Since the economy deteriorated in the 1990s, ideology has become more important since it is now the only source from which the regime derives its legitimacy.

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<sup>50</sup> Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives In North Korea* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010), 101.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*



However, in the wake of Kim Il-sung's death in 1994 and the economic crises that followed, North Korea's guiding principle has begun to falter, failing to provide practical policies to solve the acute economic situation. After Kim Jong-il succeeded his father, the regime introduced a set of political slogans such as the 'red flag ideology,' 'strong and prosperous nation,' and 'military-first policy.'<sup>53</sup> This series of policy guidelines implies that *juche* as a sole guiding principle has become less practical to promote economic growth. In addition, the emergence of a military-first policy in the Kim Jong-Il era, as an attempt to revive the economy by bringing the resources and capacity of the military into play further justifies the Kim family regime's draconian control rather than strengthening *juche* ideology as a practical guiding policy. In this sense, it seems that *juche* has failed to secure the daily necessities for the survival of its people. It is likely that distrust and criticism of the ideology, thus, are bound to surface.

#### **4. A Garrison State**

##### ***a. The Status of The Korean People's Army***

Since its foundation in 1948, the armed forces in North Korea have never been considered less important than any other sector. The North Korean constitution declares that "the mission of the Korean People's Army (KPA) is to carry out the political line of the military-first policy, and thereby defend the leadership of the revolution and safeguard the interest of the working class, in addition to protecting the socialist system, achievements of the socialist revolution, freedom, independence and peace of the fatherland."<sup>54</sup> Although the military-first-policy only began in 1998, North Korea has always regarded the KPA as its highest priority for socialist revolution and national unification. The KPA has been an important tool for the leadership to continue the regime and control internally, and its capabilities also have played a key role in maintaining external relations. Therefore, under the slogan of building a strong and prosperous nation, North Korean leaders put so much effort not only into developing military capabilities but also in strengthening their control over the armed forces.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 34–35.

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Unification Institute for Unification Education, *Understanding North Korea*, 106.

Especially, in Kim Jong-il's era, military status was further consolidated under the ideological banner of the military-first policy. This ideological and political principle gave top priority to reinforcing the armed forces and placed the KPA at the center of all state affairs. In this regard, one of the distinctive features of the North Korean armed forces, more precisely the military leadership, is that they are politicized. By 1998, Kim Jong-il raised the National Defense Commission (NDC) to the core of institutional power and took on the role of the chairman of the NDC. He also granted the military organization direct access to the Dear Leader. Patrick McEachern also points out that, under Kim Jong-il's rule, there were many generals who were involved in decision making, either directly or indirectly, without having to subordinate political ideas to party leaders.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, it seems that the power shift toward the military is undeniable in the Kim Jong-il era and that rivalry among institutions exists to some extent. On the flip side, the Dear Leader's special affection and reliance on this organization implies that he, like most dictators, was suspicious of the military's extensive coercive potential

It is uncertain whether the enhanced status of the military is still effective in the supreme leader's system. The latest news indicates that the new young leader has much interest in reforming the DPRK's dire economic situation. However, there is no clear evidence to show the changing status of the military (such as constitutional revision and reorganization of the system). As long as Kim Jong-il's system has not been modified, it seems that the institution that has the most powerful source of control is likely to be under the supreme leader's direct control. That is, military leadership, one of the most privileged segments of the society, is highly likely to remain as the most unstable and dangerous group in the absence of this control.

Another distinctive feature in the KPA is that inequality is also institutionalized within its conscription system. Despite the fact that all men in North Korea are required to register for enlistment at the age of 14, those who have families from the hostile class are excluded from military service.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, one might say

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<sup>55</sup> Patrick McEachern, *Inside the Red Box: North Korea's Post-Totalitarian Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 87.

<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Unification Institute for Unification Education, *Understanding North Korea*, 113.

that the military, other than military leadership, is also considered privileged. In the past, troops were provided sufficient food comprised of rice and two or three side dishes that were better than the average North Korean people's meal. According to Lankov, joining the military is seen as attractive because soldiers can join the Korean Worker's Party, the most essential prerequisite for social advancement.<sup>57</sup> In this context, not only military leadership but also the military in general is likely to remain loyal to their regime since they are privileged.

However, one also needs to acknowledge the recent changes in the military. The deteriorating economic situation in the 1990s deprived the military of such privileges to some extent. Recently, shortages in supply have worsened when the international community stopped food aid in response to North Korea's development of nuclear weapons. Party membership is not as highly prized as it used to be. Prolonged terms of military service also indicate that being military in North Korea does not mean being privileged in North Korean society. It is often heard that the North Korean military generates aberrations and offences by abusing its authority, which might damage civil-military relations. In this regard, although the military-first policy is still in the place, it is not easy to say that the military would not be affected by its behavior in the case of regime collapse.

#### ***b. Capabilities***

Since its establishment, North Korea has continued to expand its military capacity. Up to the mid-1970s, the process of developing military capabilities had focused on conventional arms and equipment, giving priority to quantity rather than quality. As a result, the size of North Korea's standing troops is estimated to be 1.19 million in total.<sup>58</sup> Troops are thought to consist of 1.02 million in the army, 60,000 in the navy, and 110,000 in the air force. Noteworthy is that 70 percent of the ground force is positioned south of the Pyongyang-Wonsan line.<sup>59</sup> Among them are more than 200,000

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<sup>57</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 107.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>59</sup> Defense White Paper 2012, 30.

special operations troops trained for unconventional warfare. These special forces should be identified in case of regime collapse; they could be troublesome if they resist stabilizing forces. This implies that stabilizing forces need to adopt a selective approach according to region and identified target groups.

Considering the huge task of DDR regarding the size of this targeted group, the amount of equipment matters nearly as much as the numbers of troops. North Korea has around 2,300 battle tanks, more than 8,500 howitzers, 5,100 multiple rockets launchers, and 11,000 antiaircraft guns and other air-defense weapons. When factoring in naval and air force equipment, there are many political dangers in the loss of state control.

More problematic is possession of a large number of strategic weapons. North Korea continues to develop nuclear and ballistic missiles as well as chemical and biological weapons. According to a 2012 Korean white paper, the updated version of the Daepodong missile is assumed to have a range of 6,700 km and can reach the mainland of the United States.<sup>60</sup> It is also estimated that North Korea has a stock of 2,500–5,000 tons of various chemical weapons in multiple facilities throughout the country. Regardless of the number of these weapons, it is significant that the loss of control over these deadly weapons would lead to catastrophes. Especially, the issue about the disposition of a nuclear arsenal in an upheaval raises complicated political and military problems among stakeholders. It is highly likely that the conflicting stance of external powers on the North Korean nuclear issue in the case of the Kim family regime collapse would impede not only the DDR process but also the reconstruction process as a whole.

### *c. Reserve Forces*

North Korea's four military guidelines, which were declared by Kim Il-sung in 1962, provided the following objectives to arm the military and populace politically and ideologically: a cadre-based army, modernization, militarization of the populace and a stronghold-based fortified nation. Under this bedrock principle, North Korea has mobilized around 30 percent of the population between the ages of 14 to 60 to acquire over 7.7 million reserve forces. The North Korea reserve forces are comprised of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 35.

the Reserve Military Training Unit, the Worker and Peasant Red Guard organized around the workplace and regions, the middle school military organization known as the Red Youth Guard, as well as paramilitary units. One might argue that North Korea has plenty of reserve forces. In addition, those reserve forces maintain a level of training that is commensurate with the regular forces. Even worse, every member of the reserve forces is given various combat gear, including personal arms, equipment and crew-served weapons.<sup>61</sup>

## **5. Implications**

This erosion of ideological fervor, along with the relaxation of social control, however, does not necessarily mean that North Korean citizens seem to favor and long for other types of governance. Such a simple analogy that North Korean citizens are likely to welcome liberation forces in this situation is unrealistic, and there is scant evidence to support this idea. Indeed, there is no data by which one can assume how North Koreans might think or react to the case of a regime collapse. Again, despite all these changes mentioned earlier, North Korea has completed another hereditary succession smoothly, and the Kim family regime is still supported by its comrades. Some experts even evaluate the new leader's domestic record in his first year as "surprisingly good."<sup>62</sup> Thus, it is not desirable to take a rigid approach over this controversy about the North Korean people's ambivalence. Nonetheless, based on recent changes, this paper assumes three critical points that might provide some clues to expect the possible attitude of North Koreans in the case of regime collapse.

First, the North Korean people, despite pressure for uniformity, are highly likely to have disguised preferences. North Korea has restricted individual rights and freedom, and all citizens have been forced to live a uniform life under the regime's surveillance and control. The control over thoughts through ideological indoctrination and organizational life, as well as physical control by various methods indicates that the North Korean people are supposed to live and think in the same way. Although one might

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<sup>61</sup> Ministry of Unification Institute for Unification Education, *Understanding North Korea*, 129–31.

<sup>62</sup> Mansourov, "Kim Jong Un's Domestic Policy Record in His First Year: Surprisingly Good."

argue that this unrealistic idea has succeeded to some extent, the truth runs counter to the ideal. Poor economic performance has led to privatization that has created a new way of thinking. The mindset of capitalism along with the loss of economic control has resulted in the loss of social control and widespread corruption. In this context, although the regime may look strong and united on the surface, internal cohesiveness is questionable. Individuals also are ambivalent, complying with the regime's demand in the public sphere while pursuing their own interests in the private sphere.

Second, the sense of inequality within society is likely to be pervasive such that it might lead to fragmentation among various social groups. Ostensibly, North Korea as a socialist regime has nationalized the means of production and emphasized the importance of egalitarian values. In reality, it is a viciously unequal society that discriminates against its people based on family background and loyalty to the leader. Not only the *songbun* system but also individual opportunities regarding education, occupation, marriage and place of residence indicate that the inequality is institutionalized within the society. In particular, the gap between the privileged members living in Pyongyang and ordinary people living in suburban areas is seen in the conditions of daily life as well as opportunities for social advancement. According to Cha, even after the health care system was broken after decades of economic crisis, the social elites, military, and party members who belong to these privileged groups are still able to get services, although no one else can.<sup>63</sup>

Last is the noteworthy finding that the information flow and blockage in North Korea varies according to region and class (but not necessarily *songbun*). The influx of outside information has been controlled effectively, at least in Kim Il-sung's era. It was not as critical to the regime's stability as it is now. Decades of economic crisis, however, have made the legitimacy and stability of the regime more vulnerable to outside exposure because of the eroding ideological fervor. In this context, along with many changes such as privatization and the loss of social control, the growing awareness of the outside world is palpable. However, not all North Korean people have the means to contact the rest of

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<sup>63</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 166.

the world. A few descendants of privileged people are able to go study abroad although only in certain countries. According to Lankov, during the last 15 years, approximately a half-million North Koreans have visited China, where they could see China's prosperity and learn a lot about South Korea by TV and radio.<sup>64</sup> These people include privileged members of the society, people living near the border and people involved in business. It is not clear how far this new consciousness has spread within the society; however, it is probable that certain regions including a few major cities and certain groups of people have the advantages to acquire this information. That is not to say that these people are likely to protest against the regime. Rather, they are more likely to keep silent and adopt an ambivalent stance. As some experts also point out, it is also highly probable that educated and informed people are more flexible and able to adjust themselves easily to a new situation, while the isolated and uninformed are resistant to change. In this sense, it is difficult to expect a clear-cut distinction in people's response.

In addition, North Korea is one of most militarized states in the world. Considering the regime's reliance upon its military and massive capabilities, including strategic weapons, there are some points that one should not forget in dealing with one of the largest armed forces in the case of regime collapse.

First of all, the absence of regime control over its hawkish leadership is highly likely to induce the risks of destabilizing the environment. It is difficult to predict whether the leadership will be cooperative or not. However, the status of military leadership in the regime and privileges that they acquire in the hierarchical society indicate that the military leadership might play a leading role in directing certain people's response to the regime collapse. Furthermore, the hawkish stance that military leaders have represented in decision making also implies that, although the response among military leaders would not be monolithic, there are possibilities of local resistance by military leaders.

Second, the DDR process in North Korea should be swift. Tasks that have never been seen in the context of DDR in Africa and other post-conflict situations will be posed,

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<sup>64</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 102.

including the disposal of nuclear weapons and massive amounts of conventional equipment. Most of all, dangers caused by the loss of control over such deadly weapons easily justifies the intervention of neighboring states that might further complicate the process of DDR. In addition, there are thousands of potential insurgent soldiers who have received special training in irregular warfare. These members should be identified and taken care of before they are mobilized as insurgent forces.

### C. CONCLUSION

Making predictions about the attitude of the North Korean people in the event of a North Korean governmental collapse is difficult. The problems that the collapse of the North Korean regime could create, however, arouse the necessity that analysis should be accurate. That is not to say that Bennett's optimistic assumption about how a collapse might occur is less likely to happen. This paper is not arguing whether the likelihood of the scenario is more benign or less benign. While Bennett focuses on a specific military requirement based on certain assumptions, this paper explores the current situation in North Korea in an attempt to find a more valid assumption.

The North Korean regime still maintains its power, and various control methods, the class system, ideology, and the military play a significant role in preventing this authoritarian regime from falling down. Noteworthy is that these elements are changing. In detail, the changes in the control mechanism of the Kim family regime including the social control system, *songbun* system and ideological indoctrination are likely to contribute to a divergent response from the North Korean population in the event of regime collapse. Two decades of economic crisis damaged the way that the regime maintains its control, and the spontaneous emergence of the capitalist mindset in this situation is changing North Korean citizens' way of thinking permanently. Eroding ideological fervor also indicates that the North Korean people's attitude toward the upheaval would not be monolithic. Rather, it would be reactive on a case-by-case basis. In addition, the status of the military and the regime's reliance on it further complicate the possible situation in the absence of control, suggesting a high possibility of insurgency.



Overall, the analysis made in this chapter suggests that assuming people's responses and attitudes in upheaval is more like a process problem than a static problem. North Korea is an authoritarian state in which control systems along with ideological indoctrination are projected onto its subjects. Analyzing such a unique system and current statistics is helpful to predict a probable anarchic situation in the case of regime collapse. The ROK Army needs to prepare a contingency plan based on these statistics and predictions. However, uncertainties caused by lack of information inside North Korea still suggest that close observance and flexible policy prescription are required as any future DDR process proceeds. In this sense, classifying different hypothetical methods of North Korea's collapse will be necessary in preparing the contingency plan, and such research follows in the next chapter.

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### **III. NORTH KOREAN REGIME COLLAPSE**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Assuming the probable situation in the wake of a North Korean regime collapse is more like a process problem. One can predict upheaval and prepare a contingency plan by analyzing the current social control system and by assuming the absence of such a control system. In this context, the author would argue that it could be easier to expect the North Korean people's response to be akin to the one they had to their great marshal's death in the Kim Il-sung era, but not in these days. Because of the decades of economic crisis since the 1990s, North Korean society is not as monolithic as it used to be. The dire economic situation has resulted in a capitalist mindset, and the emergence of private capital has increased social fragmentation that already existed due to an institutionalized inequality. The collapse of the state-run economy has caused the loss of social control along with eroding ideological fervor. Such changes in North Korean society complicate the expectations for the North Korean attitude toward upheaval. Given the complicated dimensions of North Korean society, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is difficult to expect how people will react to the collapse of the Kim family regime and stabilizing forces based only on analysis about the current status of North Korea. Therefore, it is better to know what variables will affect the process of the regime falling down. Identifying how these variables and different dimensions created by a correlation of variables will change North Korean citizens' attitude toward their regime collapse is helpful for contingency planning.

In this sense, the author would argue that it is desirable to assume a probable situation based on critical uncertainties that affect the process of regime collapse. To guarantee the success of DDR in a post-conflict North Korea, one should know the environment in which DDR is implemented. Analyzing how the North Korean regime collapsed, in this context, would help to better understand the probable situation in which DDR is implemented. Thus, this chapter suggests four probable scenarios based on different variables and tries to depict the possible environment in the wake of a North Korean regime collapse.

## **B. REGIME COLLAPSE**

### **1. Defining the Status of Regime Collapse**

Assuming probable situations in the case of a North Korea regime collapse raises a couple of questions. The first question is how one can define the status of collapse? It seems a difficult question and, indeed, there is no single definition of the status of regime collapse. Max Weber explains a failed state by determining whether a government maintains a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. According to Weber, North Korean regime collapse can be defined as the status in which Pyongyang no longer maintains its central control over its military, the Korean People's Army. Weber's explanation provides a basic element in determining the status of regime collapse: the absence of control. Bruce Bennett also points out that North Korea becomes a failed state if the Kim family's authority is challenged, but no one manages to establish political control.<sup>65</sup>

Considering stakeholders' interest, especially that of the ROK and United States, with regard to the North Korean regime collapse, the question of defining the regime collapse can be replaced by a more practical question: When should the ROK-U.S. combined forces intervene in the North Korea upheaval? It is obvious that the U.S. is interested first and foremost in North Korea's nuclear arsenal that directly threatens U.S. security and regional stability.<sup>66</sup> In this regard, the United States and South Korean governments are likely to intervene in North Korea when they determine the North Korean government has lost its control over nuclear weapons and WMDs that can reach to the U.S. mainland.

Of course, with a lack of access to North Korea, it is not easy to assess the DPRK domestic situation. For instance, even if North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, or any other successor, would be assassinated, the DPRK government could have a contingency plan that is designed to show its internal stability to prevent probable intervention by big powers such as the United States and China. In this sense, it is necessary to determine the appropriate timing for intervention, and the ROK-U.S. alliance should contemplate this

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<sup>65</sup> Bennett and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," 88.

<sup>66</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 460.

timing issue. Therefore, defining the status of North Korean regime collapse should be based on close observance of its control over its armed forces and deadly weapons.

The scope of this thesis, however, will not cover this issue. Instead, it assumes that North Korea's regime has collapsed; by definition it has lost its control over military and nuclear weapons. Furthermore, to provide more specific policy prescription, it focuses more on critical uncertainties that will induce the loss of control.

## **2. Scenarios and Assumptions**

### ***a. Critical Uncertainties***

North Korea could collapse suddenly in any number of ways. Indeed, speculation about the survival of the North Korean regime has continued to surface periodically. Since Kim Il-sung's death in 1994, not only problems regarding Kim Jong-il's health and succession but also a devastating famine in the 1990s and poor economic performance have raised concerns of the sudden collapse of the Kim family regime. Thus, common and confident were predictions of North Korea's demise. In this regard, previous lines of research on the topic range from identifying factors that would contribute to the regime collapse to predicting the spillover effect derived from the upheaval. Based on this wide range of scenarios, this research suggests four scenarios by analyzing critical uncertainties related to the collapse of the North Korean regime. Dr. Wade Huntley defines a critical uncertainty in formulating scenarios and assumptions by explaining three major aspects of it.<sup>67</sup> First, it should be uncertain. Second, it should be critical. Third, critical uncertainties should not be correlated or overlapped in a context.

Due to a lack of overall information about North Korea, one might say that most of the variables are uncertain. Indeed, there are too many uncertain variables that might affect the North Korean regime's collapse. Based on Huntley's definition, however, the author assumes two critical uncertainties to formulating the scenarios that are possible at the end of the current North Korean regime.

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<sup>67</sup> Wade Huntley, interviewed by author, September 30, 2013.

The first critical uncertainty is whether North Korean regime collapse will be initiated from the top or bottom. The North Korean regime can collapse by an internal crisis as has taken place recently in the Middle East and North Africa. Since the urban poor or hostile *songbun* have suffered under the current regime, the bottom-up protest is considered one of the possible triggers to the regime's collapse. Especially as the economic situation has deteriorated, the segment of society that has felt the most pain is the urban poor. While farmers could sell their own products in the black market, the salaried urban population has been exposed to the inflation and increased cost of living. Cha points out that the result is "a potentially unhappy population that is literate, educated, and may have more knowledge of the outside world than most others in country."<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, the dire economic situation not only affects the possibility of riots from the bottom but also unsettled the loyalty of social elites. The elites in North Korean society, such as party members military officers, and government bureaucrats, have benefited from the regime's rule. As some scholars note, the leadership doled out benefits to maintain the regime and to retain such elites' loyalty. However, this loyalty is doubtful. The cumulative effect of years of UN sanctions on luxury goods, which are supposed to be gifts from the Dear Leader, and the continued decline in the economy have damaged the government capacity. Cha also argues that the social elites' loyalty lasts only as long as the regime can continue the handouts.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, while Kim Jong-un has to choose his inner circle as his basis of leadership, the circle of the elites becomes smaller and smaller due to a restricted capacity to reward their loyalty. In this sense, not only the bottom-up revolution but also the top-down protest can be the possible source of discontent. These are uncertain but still critical factors that will affect the outcome in different ways.

The second critical uncertainty is the intervention of China. There are several stakeholders interested in a North Korean regime collapse other than the ROK government. Among these stakeholders, the United States and China are the most

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<sup>68</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 454.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

important actors that will affect the process. North Korea remains one of the most critical security challenges in Northeast Asia for the U.S. because of North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles and its willingness to proliferate such weapons.<sup>70</sup> In this regard, many experts note that the United States cannot stay away from the DPRK and will intervene in North Korea anyhow.

Uncertainty surrounds Chinese intervention in North Korea in the wake of a North Korean regime collapse. More precisely, it is uncertain if stakeholders can cooperate rapidly. Countries might send their militaries in without coordination to stabilize the region or to secure their interest. The consequence of such a poorly planned and coordinated response to a regime collapse in North Korea is dangerous. China is highly likely to intervene. Bennett points out that justification of intervention ranges from border control to elimination of WMDs, as well as a humanitarian crisis that is probable in the absence of state control. He also notes that China's PLA reportedly has developed contingency plans for humanitarian, peacekeeping and counter-WMD-related missions in North Korea.<sup>71</sup> According to a recent report of the U.S. Senate, regardless of the impetus for North Korean regime collapse, China will respond to safeguard its own commercial interests, and to assert its right to preserve the northern part of the peninsula within China's sphere of influence.<sup>72</sup> Despite the strong chance of Chinese intervention, a prior consultation with China is in doubt.

Given these two critical uncertainties, the author assumes four scenarios on how North Korea will collapse. The first scenario is based on the assumption that North Korea would collapse by bottom-up protests and that the ROK-U.S. alliance would fail to coordinate with China in controlling the situation. The second scenario suggests the circumstance in which the North Korean people, the urban poor and others, if any, stand against the Kim family regime and its followers, and South Korea, the United States, and China conduct a joint stabilization operation. Likewise, the third and fourth

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<sup>70</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2013), 1.

<sup>71</sup> Bennett and Lind, "The collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," 90.

<sup>72</sup> Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, *China's Impact on Korean Peninsula Unification and Questions for the Senate*, 2.

scenarios differentiate variables to create different dimensions of upheaval. All these scenarios focus on the North Korean people's attitude toward stabilizing forces to assume the possible circumstances in which the DDR is implemented.

The four resulting scenarios are depicted in Figure 1.

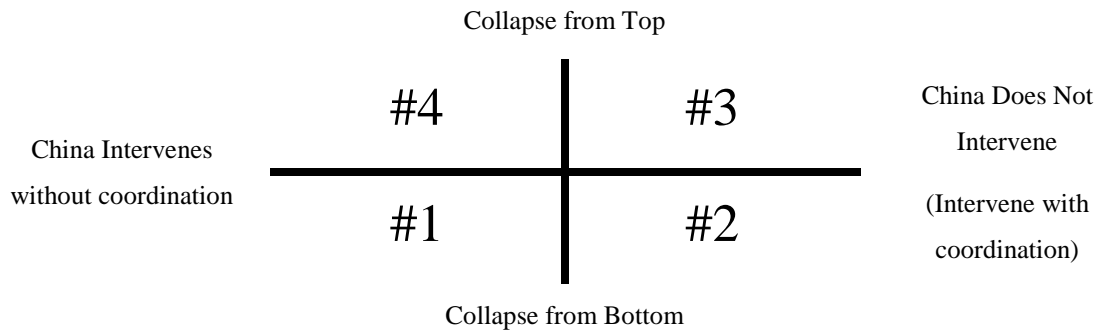


Figure 1. Four Potential Scenarios for DDR Implementation

The following analysis also traces the impact of key factors discussed in Chapter II, namely the social control system, *songbun* system, *juche* ideology and military. All these elements are likely to interact with the environment in different ways, such that they affect the process of regime collapse as well as post-collapse stabilization efforts.

#### **b. First Scenario**

The first scenario assumes that the regime collapse starts from the urban population that is literate, educated, and may have been exposed to the outside world directly or, at least, indirectly. This group is faced with a higher cost of living and delayed salary disbursements from the government. There is some evidence that supports this assumption, about the spontaneous outbreak of popular discontent. Victor Cha points out that the urban population once benefited from the regime, which may give them cause to want to regain those advantages.<sup>73</sup> The year 2011 saw a local riot, caused by an unsuccessful fruit peddler's public suicide in Tunisia, quickly develop into a nationwide revolutionary movement. The collapse of the Ceausescu regime, one of the most

<sup>73</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 454.



repressive communist regimes in the 1980s, in Romania was initiated by one incident when the security police attempted to arrest a popular priest. The political demands of the people of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was once believed to be one of the most stable of the communist regimes, eventually led to the total collapse of Erich Honecker's regime. North Koreans may seem to be too terrified, isolated and distrustful of one another to emulate the Arab Spring of 2011, the Romanians of 1989, and the political shift in the GDR of 1989. Nonetheless, as mentioned in the previous chapter, changes in North Korea are palpable. The government control is weakening, and the knowledge of the outside world is spreading while the fear is diminishing. In this context, a similar scenario is not impossible in North Korea.

Bottom-up collapse implies two probable situations in the absence of control. First, as seen in the Arab Spring, the removal of the Kim family regime does not necessarily mean a stable regime succession to a democratic one. Lankov also argues that "there is little reason to expect a North Korean revolution to be velvet."<sup>74</sup> The situation in post-revolution North Korea might become quite violent because the interests of the ruling elites and a majority of the population are likely to be different. While common North Koreans pursue democratic and nationalist idealism, the social elites are likely to have different opinions about the collapse of the current regime from which they once benefited. It is highly probable that these people understand that they will not be able to maintain their privileges. Some of them will be afraid that they might be persecuted by enraged commoners. Therefore, the second possible situation is an insurgent movement. The possibility of resistance by the social elites, such as higher party members, military leaders and bureaucrats cannot be excluded. Considering the institutionalized inequity and fragmentation among people under the Kim family regime's rule, these expectations are not that exaggerated.

Another variable in the first scenario is the Chinese intervention without coordination with the ROK-U.S. alliance. While South Korea and the United States have developed their own contingency plan to cope with the upheaval in North Korea, China

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<sup>74</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 195.

has also developed their own contingency plan, the so-called “Chick Plan.”<sup>75</sup> While the exact details of the PLA’s plans for responding to the collapse of the North Korean regime remain a national secret, Nick Miller argues that the PLA has three types of contingency plans for the upheaval in North Korea. Those are humanitarian aid for refugees, peacekeeping to serve as civil police and preventing the spread of nuclear proliferation in the region. Not only will the chaotic situation and its side effects will have a negative impact on China but also economic and territorial issues along with historical claims on the Korean Peninsula will justify Chinese intervention in the wake of a North Korean regime collapse.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the PLA indeed has the capability to reach Pyongyang in a few hours.<sup>77</sup>

The problem is that, despite the possibility of Chinese intervention, multilateral planning for the contingency in North Korea that involves China has been stymied. China seems reluctant to provoke the Kim regime by mentioning its contingency plan with its enemies, the ROK and United States.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, even if multilateral planning happens, it might be hard to reach a consensus because the interests of China and the United States related to North Korea, regional stability and denuclearization, are not the same as many experts point out.

Given this, the author assumes the situation in which Seoul and Washington may have no control over the Chinese decision to send the PLA into a collapsed North Korea. Given the experience of the Korean War, in a worst-case scenario, the risk of escalation between Chinese forces racing south and the ROK-U.S. forces racing north might result in a nuclear-level confrontation. However, it is more desirable to assume the attitude of North Korean citizens in such a complicated and tense atmosphere than to complicate the discussion in the realm of meaningless speculation.

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<sup>75</sup> Nick Miller, “China’s War Plans for Pyongyang,” *Sino-NK*, April 16, 2013, <http://sinonk.com/2012/03/10/pla-plans-for-pyongyang/>.

<sup>76</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 316–45; Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, *China’s Impact on Korean Peninsula Unification and Questions for the Senate*, 2–10.

<sup>77</sup> Nick Miller, “China’s War Plans for Pyongyang.”

<sup>78</sup> Bennett and Lind, “The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements,” 86.

It is difficult to predict the North Korean people's response in a situation where a bottom-up revolution along with the hostile confrontation with neighbors in North Korea produces manifold complications. However, it is likely that diverging responses among the people will be presented. While the urban population who raised the revolution is likely to act based on sentiment mixed with democratic and nationalistic idealism, as Lankov argues, a very significant part of the current North Korean elite is bound to side with China, begging the Chinese government for help.<sup>79</sup> It is likely that some of those elites who benefited from the former regime much prefer a Chinese-controlled satellite regime to absorption into South Korea. Thus, it is possible that China's takeover of some part of North Korea and the emergence of a Beijing-controlled regime will try to restore law and order to prevent a refugee crisis and nuclear proliferation. On the other hand, a Chinese intervention in North Korea is likely to rouse the nationalism of North Korean protesters. As seen in the Soviet experience in Eastern Europe, nationalist sentiment is not likely to welcome Chinese intervention.<sup>80</sup> It is also uncertain that these protesters will welcome South Korean stabilizing forces, as mentioned earlier.

In such upheaval, especially in the case that the implosion begins from universal protest by the lower class, it is highly likely that the government stops functioning. The social control system that has prevented the urban population from moving freely and made them live under daily surveillance is likely to be halted. In addition, government programs supplying food, medical care and security are likely to be stopped. That is, the situation is likely to induce a humanitarian disaster.

It is uncertain how *songbun* will survive in such upheaval. The mass protesters' sentiment could be complicated. However, since the bottom-up scenario assumes the urban population's mobilization derived from their grievances, the *songbun* that institutionalized inequity among people is likely to implode at the end. It is also possible that *songbun* occasions a schism among people. *Songbun* differentiates people in

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<sup>79</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 198.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

every aspects of their lives, and the grievance and rage caused by inequality could bubble just below the surface. Therefore, stabilizing forces should understand possible divisions and complications caused by *songbun*.

Likewise, *juche*, which has provided the regime's legitimacy, is likely to fade away. As the information blockage that has blinded the North Korean people becomes weak in the wake of regime collapse, most North Korean people will face the truth about the divine Kim family's depravity. It might take some time for every North Korean person to realize the irrationality of *juche*. However, in a situation where the urban population begins to crush the old legacies of tyrants, *songbun* and *juche* that have supported the regime's rule are likely to disappear eventually. That is not to say that *songbun* and *juche* do not matter in the wake of regime collapse. One should consider that these elements of North Korean society have existed more than 60 years. They will disappear in the long term, but they will not yet be gone as stabilizing forces move into North Korea.

It is most problematic that the military leaders' attitudes remains highly uncertain. Regardless of the scenario, military leaders who have resources and power are likely to make decisions on their own in the absence of a supreme leader. Thus, as Bennett points out, they could decide to invade South Korea or raise insurgent movements against the ROK-U.S. stabilizing forces. Former members of the special forces who are capable of many activities, could commit crimes individually or be used as a tool for an insurgent movement. Some of them could cooperate with either Chinese or Koreans to take advantage of the situation, but their preference and intention will be uncertain.

Overall, the dimension of two variables, bottom-up revolution and uncoordinated intervention of neighbor countries, suggests manifold complications in preparing a contingency plan.

### *c. Second Scenario*

The second scenario assumes that the international environment is less hostile and more coordinated among major stakeholders while the bottom-up revolution

still impacts the regime collapse. In spite of Chinese reluctance to coordinate contingency planning with the ROK and U.S. governments, there are a couple of reasons that support the possibility of multilateral planning in advance. Many believe that China's policy toward North Korea is special and benevolent since it is the sole source of external support. Indeed, many agree that China needs North Korea not to collapse. However, it is misleading to assume that China will support North Korea unconditionally, accepting the risk of confronting the ROK-U.S. alliance. Victor Cha argues that China's support of North Korea derives less from some anachronistic Communist allegiance than the fact that it provides mutual advantages.<sup>81</sup> He also points it out euphemistically, saying there is no love between the two despite their unique relationship. Throughout the events such as Beijing's normalization with South Korea, North Korea's nuclear test in 2006 and the following discords between China and North Korea, it is demonstrated that China will not support North Korea blindly. Rather, its preference for sustaining a minimal level of stability in North Korea is mostly motivated by economic reasons. In this sense, considering the circumstances, short-term and long-term benefits, China can cooperate with the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Once China is in the same boat as other stakeholders, there might be controversy regarding who will lead the stabilization operation in North Korea. Lankov suggests that it could be a unilateral intervention, either by South Korea (with some U.S. involvement) or China. It might be a multilateral joint intervention, such as a peacekeeping operation mandated by the United Nations.<sup>82</sup> The outcome is likely to be varied according to who leads the stabilization operation. Considering legitimacy and political burden, a UN mandate might be an optimal way to conduct such an operation. Since the UN bureaucracy is often slow and inefficient, the Six-Party Talks mechanism can be an efficient alternative. International efforts will focus on stabilization operations including humanitarian aid, preventing refugees and securing WMDs and nuclear weapons. Such cohesive efforts are likely to result in a less fragmented response among people such as a confrontation between pro-China elites and the nationalistic urban

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<sup>81</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 317.

<sup>82</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 197.

population. However, it is uncertain that North Korean citizens will be cooperative with peacekeeping forces. Still, one cannot exclude the possibility of the determined resistance of the Kim loyalists, especially hawkish and stubborn military leaders.

In this scenario, while coordinated efforts among stakeholders decrease the complication of the situation, the possibility of humanitarian crisis still exists in a situation where the government no longer functions. *Songbun* and *juche*, regardless of Chinese cooperation with the ROK-U.S. alliance, are likely to complicate people's response to outsiders. Military leaders' decisions remain unpredictable. Chinese cooperation does not mean that the North Korean military is likely to cooperate as well. Their self-reliance in terms of ideological and historical aspects could affect the leaders' decision in the end, when they have no choice but to give up their vested rights.

#### *d. Third Scenario*

The third scenario assumes top-down dismantlement within the context of coordinated international efforts. It is possible that a power struggle within the leadership induces the collapse of the Kim family regime. Although information is sparse, the existence of personal rivalries and different factions within the North Korean regime has been the source of speculation, especially after Kim Jong-un came into power.<sup>83</sup> One might say that these stories are based on hearsay, and the possibility of such a factional clash does not appear to be high under the North Korean regime. Nonetheless, factions are likely to exist.<sup>84</sup> If true, a coup from North Korean elites, such as party members, military leaders, and bureaucrats, could become a contest, with certain individuals or factions vying for power. Unconfirmed reports of past assassination attempts and military purges also indicate that a military-led coup is also quite plausible.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Tae-hoon Lee, "Dismissal of NK's Army Chief Ended with Bloodshed," *The Korea Times*, July 20, 2012, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/07/116\\_115562.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/07/116_115562.html); Alexander Mansourov, "Part III: Overhauling the Legacy Government," *38north.org*, December 21, 2012, <http://38north.org/2012/12/amansourov122112/>.

<sup>84</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 194; Stares and Wit, *Preparing for Sudden Change in North Korea*, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Stares and Wit, *Preparing for Sudden Change in North Korea*, 13.

As a result, it is probable that a new regime would eventually emerge under this scenario. The possibility of a clean break or a new policy course exists. Lankov also admits the possibility of “Pyongyang Spring.”<sup>86</sup> Pyongyang Spring can be initiated by the new rulers, out of greed, idealism and naiveté. These new rulers might be seduced by the glamour of Chinese reforms. A more positive approach to the Chinese-style economic reform and a peaceful engagement in the international community can be considered. Such changes are likely to be welcomed by the international community, and the ROK-U.S. intervention might not be needed.

However, maintaining such a reformist authoritarian regime would be difficult. The new regime would not be one that draws its legitimacy from the Great, Dear or Supreme leaders that the North Korean citizens once believed as their sole source of control. While North Koreans’ ideological fervor is being replaced by a new way of thinking, capitalism and individualism to some extent, ideological indoctrination is still likely to affect the common people’s way of thinking, especially that of the old generation. Not only ideology at the level of commoners but also rivalry among different institutions at the level of leadership is problematic in producing a governing regime that enjoys broad-based support and legitimacy. McEachern’s research unveils the evidence of disunity among North Korea’s political institutions. Therefore, it is not certain that removal of the Kim family regime will bring about the North Korean people’s more positive attitude toward an internal political revolution and a less belligerent and more engaging North Korea in the international community. A prolonged, divisive and even violent power struggle is not out of the question. As Lankov points out, once a loser in a factional clash decides to go down fighting and makes the conflict quite public, such an open clash might jeopardize the regime’s stability. Many people will perceive this lack of unity at the top as a sign of the elites’ inability to keep the situation under control which might allow them to express their grievances.<sup>87</sup> Fortunately, an advanced coordination helps the international community and stakeholders cope with such upheaval in a way that will not add to the chaos in North Korea.

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<sup>86</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 192.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

In this scenario, since changes from the top level could be less universal and violent compared to the urban population's broad protests, side effects could be less severe. However, assuming that a new regime fails to sustain stability and control, the top-down regime collapse is also likely to face a humanitarian crisis due to a lack of public supply and refugee problem. If the new regime loses its legitimacy and support from the public, long-term consequences of such a collapse will not be different from the bottom-up revolution.

*Songbun* and *juche* are also less problematic in situations where the regime collapse begins with rivalry among factions, not with public grievances caused by institutionalized inequality. People might not even be able to acknowledge the situation, which is caused by a power struggle among high officials. However, one should not ignore the possible impact of such elements on the population in the absence of authoritarian rule.

The military is a more dangerous element in this scenario. The bottom-up revolution could restrain the military leaders' decision to conduct military action against outsiders since they could face an angry population against them. However, in this situation where military leaders or factional leaders are free from public grievance against authoritarian rule, the options for those who are capable and want to keep their privilege are various.

*e. Fourth Scenario*

The fourth scenario, however, assumes another twist on the same scenario. If China pursues unilateral methods in solving the North Korean political upheaval, it is also probable that China might decide to encourage a group of ambitious people to challenge the old guard of the former regime. It has already been mentioned that China has many reasons and justifications to intervene in North Korea (such as economic, territorial and historical interests). At the same time, the author also argued that China could abandon North Korea or, at least, not support North Korea blindly if dealing with the country's collapse is outside of its interest. In the case of a top-down revolution, there are some reasons that China is likely to act immediately to restore order in North Korea.



More precisely, China prefers to maintain status quo, and it will probably try to maintain North Korea's existence and stability regardless of the regime type and person who is in power.

China has many reasons to prefer North Korea's existence to its collapse. First of all, North Korean riots and any kind of protests against the regime are likely to affect Chinese domestic stability, which is significant to its economic growth, as well. It is obvious that North Korea's implosion will cause instability in the region. As previously mentioned, China will have to deal with refugee flows and the threat of WMD proliferation that will consume its money and efforts. Lankov points out, "Any disturbance in adjacent areas might divert resources and in the worst case scenario might even trigger some unrest in China itself."<sup>88</sup> In this sense, the Chinese government is likely to prefer the status quo in North Korea, and there is no reason that it should be the Kim family regime.

Second, the Chinese believe that any change in the status quo on the Korean Peninsula that would give South Korea, under U.S. influence, a position directly on China's border could be a fundamental threat to Chinese interests. North Korea is a part of the status quo on China's northeast border that has been in existence since the tenth century. Since China is a country with centuries of border disputes with others surrounding it, the Chinese want to consider the Yalu and Tumen Rivers as the permanent and unchanging northeast border. Victor Cha claims that this Chinese perception of its Korean border is a more critical reason to support North Korea than the views in the United States.<sup>89</sup> Despite North Korea's bad behavior and Beijing's following punishments that have been seen in many different ways, China desires to maintain a minimal level of stability in North Korea.

As a result, Chinese efforts to maintain a minimal level of stability are likely to be addressed by a reformist authoritarian regime. The winning side in a power struggle is likely to prefer a less radical direction, such as Chinese-style governance,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>89</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 342.

rather than a radical change to South Korea's democracy. Thus, in such a situation, the ROK and U.S. alliance would have no reason to intervene in the upheaval other than to provide humanitarian aid and border control. Therefore, the top-down revolution seems to create a more favorable situation to China. That is not to say that the top-down revolution with Chinese intervention will produce stability in North Korea. Still, legitimacy of the new regime would be in doubt among many North Koreans, and nationalist sentiment might emerge, as many experts point out, depending on the degree of the new leader's reliance on external patrons and intervention. The ROK and U.S. alliance needs to respond to these changes.

### **3. Common Traits in All Scenarios**

The previously described scenarios indicate uncertainties and dangers in the case of a current regime collapse. In each scenario, critical uncertainties create complicated circumstances in which DDR will be implemented. It is important to know how all these different situations will affect the process of stabilization in North Korea. Although varied dimensions of North Korea's collapse would cause different side effects, a few common predictions can be made. Even though these predictions are not exactly the same in all different scenarios, four challenging spillover effects are somewhat overlapped across the scenarios.

First of all, a power struggle in Pyongyang involving competing factions is likely to happen. While North Korea has emphasized monolithic life and equality, inequality is pervasive, and the introduction of capitalism in people's lives has led to the emergence of influential individuals whose power is based on private capital. There is no consensus about the idea that the North Korean people are monolithic. In addition, considering the status of military leaders who have access to the core of decision making as well as transportation and fuel, military leaders are highly likely to be involved in a contested leadership crisis. As Bennett also points out in his perilous scenario depicting North Korea's future, North Korea could become a warlord state where civilian leaders and military leaders vie for control and resources.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, the power struggle among

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<sup>90</sup> Bennett and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," 88–89.

factions or individuals is likely to happen in the absence of the Kim family regime's control. However, a new regime or leader's way of achieving legitimacy might be different in each scenario. For instance, it will not be easy for the new regime to gain legitimacy, something like the Kim family regime once had, in the context of the bottom-up revolution scenario. The people do not seem to want another authoritarian ruler once they start to express their grievances, as seen in the case of the Arab Spring. Meanwhile, a change from the top could produce a less violent situation in which a power struggle is restricted to higher-level leadership. Likewise, the characteristics of such a struggle will also be affected by whether China will support one side or not. Therefore, although one can imagine the power struggle in an attempt to fill the power vacuum, depicting a likelihood of the situation will not be as easy as one might expect.

Second, the most commonly feared spillover effect is the humanitarian crisis and following exodus of refugees. Since the 1990s, the agricultural sector is chronically incapable of providing enough food to feed the people, and the food situation had become dire. Considering the fact that North Korea continues to depend heavily on foreign assistance, suspension of food aid from the international community, since the North Korean nuclear crisis, is also worsening the food situation. Although the PDS is not functioning as well as in the Kim Il-sung era, some North Korean citizens still rely on insufficient food supply from the PDS. According to a recent source, more than half of the total population of North Korea, around 16 million people, still relies on the PDS.<sup>91</sup> In this regard, if the loss of control results in a malfunction of the delivery and distribution of food and other assistance, the situation could become critical in North Korea. Victor Cha also points out that "when the regime eventually collapses, what is likely to be revealed is one of the worst human rights disasters in modern times."<sup>92</sup>

The food crisis is closely related to a refugee problem. As its economy has been deteriorating, capitalism has crept into North Korea to fill the gap between the people's demand and regime's incapability. North Korean citizens have now become increasingly

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<sup>91</sup> Donghyuk Jin, "PDS Distribution Volumes Rise in 2013," *Daily NK*, August 7, 2013, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk00100&num=10815>.

<sup>92</sup> Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 461.

aware of the outside world and the prosperity of China and South Korea. Since the heavily mined and guarded demilitarized zone poses formidable challenges to reaching South Korea, China would be the desirable destination. Actually, it is estimated that 400,000 North Koreans crossed into China in search of food during the 1995–1997 famine.<sup>93</sup> The breakdown of the North Korean internal security system is likely to reduce the restrictions on such movements of the hungry masses as well. It is clear that the Chinese worry about refugee flows into their country if government control breaks down. In this context, the pressure within neighboring countries, especially China and South Korea, to intervene and provide assistance would certainly grow. This might induce sensitive political and operational challenges to the process of DDR. Therefore, the issue of border control between North Korea and China should be anticipated.

However, this possible refugee disaster also depends on the scenarios. For instance, if China could intervene before most North Korean people recognize that they need to move in order to get food, the aspect of the refugee problem will be less problematic than experts point out. Indeed, China is believed to closely observe North Korean internal circumstances. As previously mentioned, China also has reasons to prevent refugee flow into its territory. Therefore, the aspects of food and refugee crises vary in different scenarios.

The third spill-over effect is a possible loss of control over North Korea's stockpile of WMDs. Based on the assumption that the military would be responsible for the stockpiles, the fraying cohesion of the military in the absence of regime control would pose serious concerns within neighboring countries. These concerns over the proliferation of WMDs would likely provide even stronger pressure on neighbors to intervene. This issue would become an urgent priority for the U.S. The instability of control over WMDs could lead to rapid proliferation and become a global crisis posing a direct threat to the United States and other states. According to Bennett, not only stockpiles but also human

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 97.

resources such as a cadre of scientists and engineers who developed North Korea's WMD programs should be identified and controlled, since they could spread their WMD knowledge.<sup>94</sup>

Although the loss of regime control might pose concerns of WMD proliferation, the aspects of the issue will be different from case to case. In the context of a bottom-up scenario, the problem caused by the loss of control over the military is more problematic than in the situation where the military still keeps its guards in front of the WMD sites. Thus, in the context of top-down scenarios, the ROK-U.S. alliance should consider building trust with pro-democracy or pro-ROK-U.S. forces first, rather than intrude into a WMD site in an effort to secure them.

Fourth, the most problematic situation common to all scenarios that would impede the process of DDR in the wake of government collapse in North Korea would be the outbreak of insurgency. Since inequality is institutionalized within North Korean society, it seems that fragmentation within various groups of people is possible. That is, there are certain people who have been discriminated against based upon their *songbun* and, recently, the rich-poor gap. Grievances that have been brewing under the surface due to the regime's control are likely to be expressed in the absence of existing social order. Not only *juche* indoctrination, which established a rigid foundation of anti-imperialist sentiment, but also privileges that some groups have had would result in resistance to, or reluctance to cooperate with, stabilizing forces. Although ideological fervor has eroded recently, that does not necessarily mean that the North Koreans have become more receptive to outsiders. The status of the military, along with its resources including WMDs and massive amounts of conventional weapons, would raise a possibility of resistance by such a group. That is not to say that insurgency is expected from whole military units. Rather, a contested leadership crisis could lead to the defection of certain North Korean military units out of defeat and desperation. Some North Korean soldiers could go home and police would not show up for work, as happened with Iraqi soldiers and police at the end of central government control in that country. In addition, a lack of

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<sup>94</sup> Bennett and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," 101.

food and uncertainty about who is in power could further fuel a potential of insurgency. Hunger would encourage criminal activity, and people would need protection. As in Iraq and Afghanistan, militias would emerge to fill the security vacuum, providing people with protection from looting and banditry. In this sense, a collapse of the Kim family regime would create serious instability in North Korea.

Meanwhile, the aspects of insurgent movements can be differentiated by the situation. For instance, while the bottom-up revolution and following prolonged power struggle among leadership can raise the dangers of insurgency, the top-down change and timely supports from neighbors can normalize the function of government swiftly. Thus, in such context, although grievances derived from illegitimacy of a new government might still exist, the possibility of insurgency will be different from complete chaos, which is formed by the bottom-up revolution and hostile confrontation between China and the ROK-U.S. alliance in North Korean territory.

Overall, these problems in the absence of state control that have been suggested by many experts are possible and overlap across the scenarios. However, these problems are varied, as are their effects on the process. That is, it is difficult to predict a common possible situation in all scenarios. Humanitarian risk is predictable in the loss of state control, but the level of significance of the problem depends on the duration of the power vacuum and the timing of external aid. Likewise, the proliferation of WMDs and risks of insurgency are also affected by the way that other variables correlate with each other. Thus, the ROK and U.S. alliance should be prepared for all these ripple effects in each context of the different scenarios.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

Differentiating dimensions of the potential causes contributing to North Korea's collapse provides different scenarios in which post-conflict stabilization would be implemented. As shown, whether the collapse of the North Korean regime would be initiated either by bottom-up riots or top-down revolution results in complicated but somewhat different situations. From the ROK-U.S. alliance's perspective, Chinese intervention also raises concerns of complicating the upheaval by responding to pro-

China social elites, which is likely to accelerate fragmentation among the people. Significantly, although these factors result in varied circumstances, fragmentation among people in the absence of authoritarian rule is unavoidable. That is, silent and peaceful transition from the Kim family regime to another form of government is less likely to happen. A power struggle within leadership is probable, and Chinese support for one side in an attempt to maintain stability is probability. Protests from the urban poor population, appealing to democracy and nationalism, are likely to clash with the old guard who are loyal to the Kim family regime. The duration of this kind of fragmentation is unknown, but diverging responses will be a reality. Thus, it complicates the expectations for the circumstances in which stabilizing forces would operate. Therefore, preparing for disasters, such as humanitarian crisis, risk of WMD proliferation, refugee problem, and insurgency, in advance with other stakeholders should be conducted in each different scenario.

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## **IV. POLICY RECOMENDATIONS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

It is difficult to know how stable the Kim family regime is and to predict how the North Korean regime will collapse other than to say it could happen. Nevertheless, the ripple effects and consequences of a collapse, as described in the previous chapters, can be substantial not only to the North Korean people but also to neighboring countries. The absence of a supreme leader is likely to produce a power struggle among various factions to seize the throne. If dismantlement of the regime begins from the bottom of society, this political upheaval will be more complicated since mass behavior will be accompanied by various sentiments. As government functions stop, it is likely to create a lack of food and supplies among the general public and among those who do not have access to the black market. A lack of food, insufficient medical supplies, and suspension of government subsidies will bring about a humanitarian crisis. Many people in such circumstances will try to find a way to survive. North Koreans are more likely to move out of their country as many did in the 1990s famine. Not only this refugee problem but also concerns of WMD proliferation in the absence of state control of the military will justify the stakeholders' intervention in North Korea and that will further complicate the internal political chaos.

All these uncertainties complicate any prediction about the people's attitude toward their regime's collapse and the probable situation in which a stabilization operation, precisely the DDR implementation, will be conducted. Considering these uncertainties, the previous chapter tried to predict the consequences of regime collapse by differentiating the dimensions of two critical uncertainties. Even though it was hard to find a common trait that is applicable to all scenarios, each scenario suggested different ripple effects that should be prepared for by the ROK-U.S. alliance in advance. In this sense, this chapter provides policy recommendations for each scenario, so that the stabilizing forces can prepared for and optimize their operations in each circumstance.

## **B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section describes the assumption that is created by varying critical uncertainties, and considers problematic issues in each scenario. Then, policy recommendations are suggested.

### **1. Policy Recommendations for the First Scenario**

The first scenario assumes that the bottom-up revolution will request for changes in North Korean society and that China will intervene without coordination with others. In such a case, diverging responses will be presented. While the urban poor population is likely to call for a democratic and nationalistic idealism, North Korean elites who benefited from the former regime are likely to prefer a Chinese-controlled satellite regime than to be executed.<sup>95</sup> Thus, it is possible that China's takeover of some part of North Korea, based on the North Korean elites' request, and the emergence of a Chinese-controlled regime will confront the nationalism of North Korean protesters. In such upheaval, especially in a case where the implosion begins from universal protest by the lower class, it is highly likely that the government will stop functioning. That is, the situation in which most of the urban class, which relies on government supplies causes the upheaval there is likely to be a humanitarian disaster.

Therefore, immediately and most importantly, the ROK and U.S. stabilizing forces should be prepared to provide sufficient food and other basic needs across all of North Korea. If they fail in this task, not only starvation but also disease will pose a serious threat that will further complicate the situation, potentially resulting in a refugee problem. Since the ROK government alone does not have the capability to provide substantial humanitarian aid to North Korea for decades, it must ask for the help of international humanitarian organizations to deliver the aid. Thus, the ROK and U.S. alliance should be able to secure the areas while moving into North Korean territories that are not occupied by China or a China-supported regime. They need to expect possible attacks from Chinese-supported North Korean military or spontaneous resistance to

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<sup>95</sup> Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, 198.

outsiders from the local population. Stabilizing forces also need to provide escorts to prevent the loss of supplies donated by international organizations, in such an environment.

To continue this type of humanitarian aid, the ROK and U.S. alliance also should be able to secure a main supply route, either by securing one of the major ports or exploiting a land route through the demilitarized zone. In this sense, combined operation by ROK and U.S. army, marine and navy units should be conducted to establish a bridgehead to North Korean territory at the very beginning. At the same time, the ROK and U.S. stabilizing forces need to strengthen their credibility among the North Korean people. A task force team, which is designed to communicate with North Korean delegates and to enhance credibility, should be organized and trained in advance. The main mission of this kind of unit will be to provide the North Korean people with a positive image of stabilizing forces.

The second task in this scenario is for the ROK and U.S. alliance to avoid military confrontation with China. Many experts point out that the ROK government needs to coordinate with others, especially the United States and China, in advance to cope with the contingency in North Korea. However, as mentioned before, China is reluctant to talk about the issue in advance. Accordingly, the first scenario assumes that China intervenes in North Korea without coordination with others. In this sense, China, as it has traditionally objected to U.S. operations near its territory, is likely to be concerned about ROK and U.S. military operations within North Korean territory after the Kim family regime's collapse.<sup>96</sup> Although unexpected local clashes might happen as both sides rush toward similar ground objectives, such as the Yongbyon nuclear plant, the ROK and U.S. alliance should continue to communicate with China through various channels, including the United Nations. The escalation of tension between the two sides should not be prolonged.

However, as Bennett points out, China could decide merely to disrupt Korean unification, or it could intervene because of Chinese nationalism to demonstrate its

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<sup>96</sup> Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 2013), 156, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR331.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR331.html).

position in the region.<sup>97</sup> If such is the case, the ROK-U.S. alliance should insert units rapidly into North Korea, and it is desirable that the units are composed of airborne or light infantry soldiers so that they can be carried by aircraft. Once these preemptive units are in place before China moves into North Korea, regardless of these units' actual deterrence, China needs to contemplate the possibility of confronting the ROK-U.S. forces in North Korean territory. However, this does not mean that China would not be likely to intervene in North Korea. Not only the mutual defense agreement between North Korea and China but also pro-Chinese North Korean elites' requests for Chinese help are likely to justify Chinese intervention. Given the serious threats that a North Korean regime collapse would pose to China, China would likely intervene in North Korea. It is significant that the ROK must prepare to intervene in North Korea promptly, as soon as it recognizes signs of the North Korean regime's instability.

## **2. Policy Recommendations for the Second Scenario**

In the second scenario, China does not intervene, or it intervenes in coordination with the ROK-U.S. alliance. This does not mean that there is nothing that China could or would do. In either case, the ROK-U.S. alliance needs Chinese support to stabilize North Korea effectively. A coordinated intervention effort with China would be the best policy option compared to any other alternative.

First, the bottom-up revolution is likely to produce a pro-Chinese faction or social elites who ask for Chinese help, as mentioned before. If China supports these groups directly or indirectly, the process of stabilizing North Korea is likely to be prolonged, and it will waste more money and time. Even worse, unification with South Korea could be impossible due to the division among the North Korean people. Therefore, the ROK and U.S. need to persuade China to distance itself from such requests from North Korea. They need to emphasize that unification would not harm Chinese interests in the region. Of course, this is not a simple issue, and one might argue that it would be impossible. However, if China decides not to intervene or to cooperate with the ROK-U.S. forces, regardless of its strategic calculation, building credibility between the two sides and

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<sup>97</sup> Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse*, 261.

focusing on urgent tasks, such as humanitarian crisis, refugee problem, and the risk of WMD proliferation, should be possible. In this sense, while monitoring possible unofficial support from the Chinese to pro-Chinese North Korean elites, the ROK government should try to enhance trust among stakeholders.

Second, though hard to imagine, it is desirable that stabilizing operations be implemented and directed by a combined command. Unfortunately, the possibility of joint operations among the ROK, United States and China is very low. Bennett suggests that the best alternative would be to define a separation line for the PLA versus the ROK-U.S. alliance, preventing the two sides from blundering into each other.<sup>98</sup> In such case, the ROK government should confirm eventual Chinese withdrawal from North Korea by either mutual agreement or a UN resolution. The ideal scenario would be that, at the initial phase, both sides might be responsible for providing internal security and humanitarian aid, securing WMD sites and subduing possible insurgency. Once the risks of refugee or criminal activities flow into China and WMD proliferation are controlled, the United States and China would withdraw at the same time. If China does not intervene, it is likely to secure its border along North Korea, preventing refugee influx and WMD flow into China. It sounds like a naïve scenario; however, it is the way to prevent possible confrontation between the United States and China that once happened in the same place almost 60 years ago.

### **3. Policy Recommendations for the Third Scenario**

The third scenario assumes top-down dismantlement within the context of coordinated international efforts. In such case, one might argue that a power struggle at the top leadership level could progress smoothly so that a new regime could emerge without significant instability in North Korea. However, such a regime is less likely to acquire legitimacy from North Korean citizens who believe and have been indoctrinated with the notion that only one person can give them guidance. Given this, in the third scenario it is quite possible that a prolonged, divisive and even violent power struggle could lead to the malfunction of government. Even worse, a power struggle from the top

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 274.

leadership is likely to involve military power that might lead to some mobilization by factional military leaders. Eventually, a losing side in a factional rivalry could decide to go down fighting and make the conflict public; such action would jeopardize any stability and complicate the circumstances. Even worse, many North Korean military personnel could be led into criminal activity or insurgent movements with their arms, including WMDs.

The foremost mission in such a situation would be to intervene and calm warring parties. There are many principles and lessons from previous peacekeeping operations about mitigating between two or more warring parties. Since most parties are fighting for their survival, some will come to feel they are losing. According to experts on peacekeeping operations, providing material incentives, such as food, money, amnesty pledges, and other inducements, in exchange for a cease-fire could work if both sides agree on the arbitrator's suggestions.<sup>99</sup> In this sense, the ROK-U.S. alliance and China can provide inducements to deescalate tensions between the two. Considering North Korean propaganda about the ROK and the United States, China might be the optimal mediator at first. The losing side would likely be receptive to such inducements of a peace agreement. However, there is a possibility that a winning faction would likely be more difficult to convince and that it would continue aggression. In such case, the ROK-U.S. forces and China might consider coercive methods. One might assess the possibility of the U.S. and Chinese intervention in a North Korean civil war. Considering the risks of nuclear proliferation and refugee flow into Chinese territory, it is likely that both big powers are not going to just watch fire spreading from a distance.

If power struggle among various factions leads to ROK-U.S. and Chinese intervention in North Korea, the possibility of insurgency and criminal activity still exists. Bennett points out that "to deal with these threats, the ROK and the United States likely need to be prepared to destroy or eliminate the military capabilities of these parties, much as the United States has practiced in Iraq and Afghanistan."<sup>100</sup> However, it is essential

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<sup>99</sup> Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices After Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 93.

<sup>100</sup> Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse*, 178.

that the ROK and China simultaneously continue the efforts to make these factions abandon such activities by providing inducements. It is also critical that the ROK-U.S. alliance and China enhance their relations with the North Korean population since insurgent movements will not last long without support from the population.

#### **4. Policy Recommendations for the Fourth Scenario**

In the fourth scenario, however, if China pursues unilateral intervention, mitigating a power struggle and suppressing insurgency would be complicated. The worst scenario for the ROK-U.S. alliance would be the establishment of a new pro-Chinese regime before the alliance intervenes. Indeed, as mentioned previously, China wants to maintain the status quo in North Korea, so it might support one of the factions to restore order as soon as possible. If the ROK-U.S. side does not intervene, a factional rivalry could be ended soon with Chinese intervention. To prevent North Korea from becoming one of China's satellites, the ROK-U.S. forces need to move promptly and take a side in a factional rivalry. China and North Korea might insist on the ROK-U.S. forces' withdrawal from North Korean sovereign territory. Meanwhile, a losing side might need protection and a patron for survival. Thus, the ROK-U.S. forces could find an excuse to remain involved in the situation. One might argue that such action would likely escalate tension in the region. However, if China establishes a puppet government in North Korea, unification might be impossible in a certain period of time, and the ROK-U.S. alliance would lose leverage regarding North Korean issues. Thus, the ROK-U.S. forces should intervene promptly, although the legitimacy of such an intervention is controversial. In such a situation, to avoid real confrontation between China and the ROK-U.S. alliance, both sides need to define a separate line between them as suggested in the second scenario. While negotiating with the Chinese about common threats, the ROK-U.S. stabilizing force needs to conduct humanitarian aid and secure WMD sites within its occupied area.

#### **C. POLICY RECOMMENDATION EFFECTIVE IN ALL SCENARIOS**

Threats posed by the collapse of the North Korean regime are distinct in each scenario and depend on the development of the situation. As mentioned in Chapter III,

one could expect a humanitarian crisis, complication caused by *songbun* and *juche*, as well as dangers from military components in the wake of a North Korean regime collapse. The severity of the problem, however, would depend on the duration of the power vacuum and the timing of external aid and intervention. Thus, it is difficult to predict a common possible situation in all scenarios. There is no simple prescription for the situation resulting from a North Korean regime collapse. However, there are still some issues that are overlapping and problematic in all scenarios. Those issues need to be prepared for in common in all contingency planning.

First of all, the ROK-U.S. combined forces should enhance their readiness. Regardless of the scenario, the loss of state control in North Korea would likely result in a lack of basic needs such as food and medication, especially in the initial phase. The ROK government should be prepared to provide humanitarian aid until international organizations or other support arrives. In addition, although U.S. intelligence devotes substantial assets to monitoring North Korea, the signs of North Korean instability might not be that obvious. Thus, although it might take some time to make a political and strategic decision to intervene in North Korea, the ROK-U.S. armed forces should be prepared and trained to move into North Korea and to conduct stabilization operations. Given that Chinese have better intelligence about North Korea and the risks of a humanitarian crisis and WMD proliferation, the odds are against the ROK-U.S. alliance unless that alliance decides to intervene promptly after a North Korean government collapse.

Second, the ROK-U.S. stabilizing forces should understand recent changes in North Korean society and their impact on *songbun* and *juche*. To rebuild a society where institutionalized inequality has split people into several groups, stabilizing forces need to know the possibility of conflict among the different groups of people and one's exploitation of another to prevent further division of a war-torn society. Ideological indoctrination in some people's minds should be treated carefully in a way that does not impede rebuilding a society. While some educated people might be able to adapt to a new order easily, others could have difficulties understanding a new environment. Thus, a long-term education for those people should be planned in advance, and at the same time,



material inducements must be offered to pull people out from an illusionary personality cult.

Third, as all scenarios suggest the potential dangers of military elements such as the loss of control over WMDs and special forces, the priority to secure the situation and to prevent further complication should be placed on dealing with military elements. Regardless of the scenario, the military's potential action in an upheaval is too uncertain, and deadly in the worst case. False optimism will lead to an irremediable situation. Since the military is the major target group of DDR, this component should be identified and controlled by strong measures, if necessary.

Lastly, as described in each scenario, coordination among stakeholders is positively necessary. The terms "ROK-U.S. alliance" and "ROK-U.S. side" have been used frequently in this thesis because it is assumed that the ROK government and the U.S. government share a common vision for a contingency in North Korea. If not, then developing this kind of contingency plan is unnecessary and meaningless. There is no doubt that South Korea cannot conduct this huge task without help from its allies. Many UN-led peace operations and U.S.-led stabilization operations demonstrate that post-conflict reconstruction tasks cannot be successful without coordination among stakeholders. Thus, South Korea and the United States should develop a common vision for a potential reunification of Korea and for the future role of the ROK-U.S. alliance as well as for the continued presence of U.S. forces on the peninsula. The key element in preparing for a North Korean regime collapse is coordinating with China. Even though China is reluctant to discuss the issue, the ROK and U.S. government, at least, should pursue a quiet dialogue with China to discuss common threats and mutual concerns. In all scenarios, China is the most uncertain but critical variable. Without transparency and credibility between and among the ROK, the United States and China, the gap among the North Korean population is more likely to be widened, and the circumstances would likely become more complicated.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Overall, one cannot know what is going to happen if the current North Korean regime collapses. As this thesis attempted to show, upheaval of any form is likely to be highly complicated and messy. That is not to say that interested parties cannot prepare for such a catastrophic event in advance. As suggested, each scenario raises certain issues. The analysis identified common traits that overlap to some degree in all scenarios. Policy recommendations for those common traits are important and necessary in preparing for contingency. However, while those preparations will help to meet upheaval, the author would argue that those are never enough to solve the problems that will present themselves in the case of a North Korean regime collapse. The purpose of this scenario making is not to make accurate predictions but to guard against over-confidence and optimism about the wide range of uncertainties that will be encountered. Therefore, further research on the future trajectory of a poor, restricted and highly armed people in the absence of control should be developed to prevent disasters in the region.

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